

# A FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH PHILOSOPHY

An Introduction Especially  
Designed for Young Men and Women

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# PART ONE

## THE PROBLEM OF MORALITY

### INTRODUCTION

THE OBJECT of this book is to present some philosophical ideas to those who are making their first acquaintance with philosophy. Philosophy may be defined as the endeavour to understand the nature of the universe considered as a whole, not some one department of it, as physics is concerned with matter, or one aspect of human activity, as art is concerned with beauty or religion with God, but the whole body of human thought to which science and art and religion and morals and history contribute, no less than the day to day experience of ordinary people. Philosophy, then, in a very real sense is concerned with everything, concerned not so much to collect the facts—that is the business of others, of scientists, or technicians, or historians—but to pool them in order that it may interpret their meaning and assess their significance. And by the interpretation of the facts and their significance, I mean what answers do they permit us to give, what conclusions to draw in regard to such questions as:—Is the universe a meaningless concourse of atoms, a mere hurrying of material endlessly, or has it point and purpose? Was it perhaps designed by a mind *for* a purpose? If so, what part do human beings play in fulfilment of that purpose? If no purpose can be discerned, is there any sense in saying that some ways of life are nevertheless better than others? And if better, what do we mean by better? How, in fact, ought a man to live and what things should

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he pursue? What things are truly valuable, valuable that is to say in themselves, and not merely as means to something else, and so on.

These are the sorts of questions, questions as to the ultimate nature and purpose (if any) of things which mankind has asked in every age, and it is upon them that the great philosophers have speculated. What is called philosophy consists of the answers that they have suggested. I use the words "speculated" and "suggested" advisedly, because it would be idle to expect agreement and certainty in regard to questions of so all-embracing a scope. Besides what a man thinks on fundamental matters, thinks, for example, on the question, what are the things which are really valuable in themselves, depends at least as much upon the nature of the man, the thinker, as upon the nature of the things about which he thinks.

Where the answers are so various, the material so rich, what principles should determine the selection of philosophical ideas which are to be presented to those who are approaching the subject for the first time? I am thinking more particularly of young men and women of, say, from sixteen to twenty years old, taking or capable of taking, if the chance be given them, a disinterested interest in the world about them. And by "disinterested interest" I mean an interest in things for their own sake inspired simply and solely by curiosity about this mysterious world into which we have been pitchforked without so much as a "by your leave," and not by any considerations of what will be of advantage to us personally, of what, that is to say, we can "get out of it."

I am deeply impressed by a phrase which I once read in a book of Lowes-Dickinson; "An unspoiled youth of nineteen," he wrote, "with his mind just

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waking up and his feelings all fresh and open to good, is the most beautiful thing this world produces." If "produces" be interpreted to mean produces in the way of human beings, I think this is true; for I believe that there is just such a moment in our lives, when the flame of the mind burns bright and clear before it is banked down under the clinker and ash of worldly cares, of marriage and a family, of money and a career.

These, then, are those for whom I am primarily writing, and bearing them in mind the following are the principles that have guided my selection of material. Each chapter contains a philosophical idea or group of philosophical ideas which conform to the following conditions:—

1. They have been put forward by famous philosophers.
2. They have had historical importance in the history of human thought.
3. They are clearly presentable and easily understood.
4. They are provocative and start people thinking.
5. They whet the appetite for more and, if all goes well, send the reader to the great philosophers for more.

Most men's first thoughts about philosophy are destructive of accepted beliefs and hostile to conventional morality. They disturb the foundations of what most of us take so easily for granted. My first three chapters are concerned with philosophical ideas of this kind. Chapters V and VIII go deeper, and present views on man and the universe which are to be found in Plato, and which are largely my own.

C. E. M. JOAD.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS MORALITY

#### WHAT THE VIEW MAINTAINS

IN THIS first chapter I want to consider certain views that philosophers have put forward to the effect that man is by nature without morality; in other words, he is purely selfish and seeks only his own interests and that what we call morality, involving as it does the distinction between right and wrong, is a gigantic imposture, a sort of hoax or plant that has been "put over" on mankind or, more precisely, that mankind in general—and its rulers in particular—has "put over" on itself.

There is no doubt that in ordinary life we habitually make a distinction between right and wrong. *This*, we say, is what we want to do; but *that* is what we ought to do. Why ought we to do it? Because some things are right and ought to be done and others wrong and ought not to be done. Thus we would say it is right to play for your side and fight for your regiment; wrong to play only for the sake of your own glory and achievement, to let down your side, betray your comrades, desert your regiment. We also hold some things and some people to be good and others bad. Thus Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assissi are held to be good; murderers, torturers, liars, traitors and scroungers are held to be bad.

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In addition, then, to the distinctions between right and wrong, want and ought, there is also the distinction between good and bad. Now, according to the view I am going to consider, these words, "right," "wrong," "good" and "bad" don't in fact have any distinctive meaning or, rather, they stand for ideas which are totally different from what we normally suppose.

To say "This is right" means, on this view, "This suits me or conduces to my interests"; to say "This is good" means "I happen to like it." "Wrong" and "bad" stand for the opposite notions. Or one may mean by saying "This is right," "This suits *most people*" and by "This is good," "*Most people* happen to like it." Think of society as a lot of people crowded together in a small space or, as one philosopher put it, like a collection of hedgehogs driven together for the sake of warmth. It is obvious that the spikes of the close-packed hedgehogs will prick. Therefore, men have devised different kinds of felt to put on the spikes so that they don't hurt each other too much. This felt is what we know as morality. Thus what we call "right" is simply the name that we give to those things which society has found it convenient for its members to do and those beliefs which it has found it convenient for them to hold, in order that they may live together without hurting one another more than is absolutely necessary. Thus men find that it is easier to get on together if most people tell the truth, so that they are able to believe one another and rely upon one another's word. It is easier, again, for a country to survive if its people are prepared to fight for it and sacrifice themselves for it, than it would be if they were timid and selfish. Thus honesty and truth-telling are called "right,"

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and bravery and unselfishness are regarded as virtues. By giving them these moral labels and so ensuring that they shall win public approval, society gets its members to do what is "right" and to value and cultivate these so-called virtues. By this means it does its best to ensure truthful speech and brave actions by its citizens.

Or, again, we may mean by "This is right," "This is in the interests of the ruling class of a particular society"; by "This is good," "This is what the ruling class admires and values." Thus it is in the interests of the ruling class of a slave-owning society and, incidentally, of a school, that slaves and schoolboys should be obedient and industrious; accordingly, obedience and diligence are termed virtues, and slaves and schoolboys are encouraged to cultivate both. Again, that hair should be worn short and skirts long or alternatively hair long and skirts short is found to be profitable by the men who set the fashions for society women. Accordingly, they induce fashionable women to wear long hair and short skirts—or the other way round. Such is the force of example and the power of snobbery that in due course all women hold long hair and short skirts—or the other way round—to be admirable and dress accordingly, and those who invent and dictate women's fashions reap the profit. Thus "good" and "beautiful" are simply names for that which it suits the ruling class of a society for people as a whole to believe to be "good" and "beautiful."

What all these views have in common is the contention that the qualities of being "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong," do not belong to things in themselves; these are only the names that people give to things from what might be called personal and self-interested motives. To say "This

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is good " means no more than that somebody or other thinks that it is. Hence nothing is really good or bad, right or wrong; it is only thinking that makes it so. Alter people's thoughts by giving them, for example, a different education or putting them in a different set of economic circumstances, and what they think good, bad, right and wrong, will also be altered. And, since on this view, there is no difference between good and what is thought to be good, good, bad, right and wrong will themselves be altered.

### THAT MORALITY IS ONLY CONVENTIONAL

Two conclusions emerge from this way of thinking. The first is that morality is not natural to man but is only conventional is, that is to say, something that we have invented because it suits us. Whereas most people and almost all religious people have maintained that the ability to perceive the difference between right and wrong is the distinctive characteristic of human beings as opposed to animals, being in fact a faculty implanted in man's heart by God who created us, on this view, there is no such distinction, and man is not, therefore, unique in this respect among the animals. Also—though this doesn't *necessarily* follow—there is nothing moral about the universe itself which is without point or purpose.

The view has, in the second place, its application to politics, where it issues in the conclusion that States may do whatever they conceive to be in their own interest, because, for example, it conduces to increase of power, or helps them to conquer their neighbours. For if there is no such thing as "right," then it follows that "might" is all that counts, which presumably is what people mean when they say that "might is right."



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I propose to examine some of the roads along which philosophers have travelled to these conclusions. I will begin by taking two examples from Plato's *Republic*, one of the most famous books in the library of philosophy.

### 1. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

\* This is a theory as to the origin of human society. Originally, it maintains, there was no such thing as society; therefore, there was neither law nor security. Men lived separately like beasts in the jungle, each man's hand being against his fellows, and his fellows' hands against him. This condition of anarchy and non-morality, that is to say, no rule of law and no rules of morals, is man's natural state; as Plato puts it through the mouth of one of the speakers in the *Republic*, man *naturally* lived in a state of injustice. Presently, however, this condition was found to be so intolerable that men came together and decided to end it. This they did by forming society. In order to enter society each man made a sacrifice. He sacrificed his *natural* right to prey upon his fellows provided that they made a similar surrender in respect of himself. As Glaucon, the speaker in question, puts it, each man gave up his *natural* right to do injustice. As the result of this agreement, which is known as the social contract, society was established and in order to ensure that the contract was kept, in addition to the laws which regulated men's dealings with one another and prevented them from doing injustice, men established a police force and prisons to enforce them and punished those who broke them. It is by this means, says Glaucon, that society was established.

Let us consider what this theory, the social contract theory of the origin of society as it is called, involves. First, that man is not moral by nature

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but that morality is only embraced as a sort of second best. The best thing of all is to do injustice, to do it, that is to say, without suffering it in return. But since for most of us this is impossible, we give up the best and take the second best. That is, we give up our natural right to do injustice provided that we are guaranteed against injustice. But that it is a second best you can easily see, says Glaucon, from the story of Gyges. Gyges was a legendary Greek figure who discovered a ring, which, when worn, enabled its wearer to become invisible. Gyges proceeded to use the power of invisibility that the ring gave him to murder the king, marry the queen, and establish a reign of terror over his subjects. In other words, he did whatever he chose without let or hindrance and escaped the normal consequence of his actions by assuming the cloak of invisibility.

"Now, which of you," asks Glaucon, "in effect is prepared to put his hand on his heart and affirm that, if he were in Gyges's position, that is, if he could do whatever he liked and escape the consequences, he wouldn't do much the same as Gyges did. Are you, in any event, quite sure that you would live the dull respectable, law-abiding lives that you do at present?" All of which goes to show that men only act morally from fear of the consequences which society has taken care to make as painful as possible, since they are necessary to its continued existence.

If it weren't so, why, Glaucon asks, have all societies taken care to provide themselves with a police force backed by prisons to deter people from acting as they would *naturally* like to do?

THAT PEOPLE ONLY ACT MORALLY BECAUSE OF THE  
CONSEQUENCES

There is another side to all this. People, it must

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be admitted, who live in a well-established society, do in fact tend to embrace morality rather than immorality. Just think how well behaved and law-abiding most of us are to-day. But only because of the rewards by means of which society has sought to encourage people to act in the kind of way which suits it. And that, in the long run, is why human beings act morally.

Take, as an example, honesty. If everybody lied and cheated, society would be impossibly difficult to run.\* Accordingly society encourages honesty. Honesty, it says, is the best policy. Be honest, it says again, and not only will you have a good reputation so that people speak well of you, but you will get rich. Similarly with courage; if, when society was threatened by its enemies, nobody was willing to fight for it, society would come to an end. So society encourages courage, giving the Royal Humane Society's medal for saving life in peace and the V.C. for bravery in war. Act, in short, in ways of which society approves and you will win the esteem of your fellows and prosper. And so people do in fact tend to prefer morality to immorality, not because they value and esteem morality for its own sake, but because of the rewards and punishments with which society has sought to persuade them to cleave to the one and to deter them from the other. Remove the rewards, take away the punishments and people would start to behave *naturally* again. That is to say, they would start to behave non-morally as, indeed, they always do and have done when what we call the customary restraints of law and order break down.

The upshot of all these considerations is the same.

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\* I develop this notion in a later chapter. See Chapter II, page 5.

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Man is not *naturally* moral, but non-moral. Morality is merely conventional, that is to say, it is a set of rules and laws originally invented by human beings for purposes of convenience, established, codified and enforced by society and now so ingrained in most of us that in quiet times we accept them as a matter of course. Men, in short, are moral not because they want to be, but through fear of the consequences if they are not.

Nor are the consequences confined to this world; for at this point religion is brought in to reinforce the argument. But at this point I am proposing to break off in order to follow a slightly different chain of reasoning which leads to much the same conclusion. I shall return in a moment to the account of religion given by advocates of this view.\*

### 2. JUSTICE AS THE INTEREST OF THE "STRONGER"

The argument that follows is also to be found in Plato's *Republic*. The ostensible theme of this great Dialogue is the nature of justice, and in the first book several speakers give different definitions of justice which Socrates has little difficulty in showing to be inadequate. A certain Thrasymachus then announces as his definition that "Justice is the interest of the stronger." What he means is that in any community those who are the "stronger," that is to say, the governing class, make the laws and also, incidentally, form public opinion and determine the system of education. The laws they make, the opinions they promote, the education they prescribe are of such a kind that by the mere process of living in accordance with the laws, thinking in accordance with the public opinion and receiving instruction under the system of education the citizens of the State in their actions, their thoughts, their

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\* See pages 17—19.

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values and their tastes will always tend to bolster up the existing structure of society and, therefore, to keep in power those who already have the power. Thus what people call "good," "right," "just" and so on is always that which serves the interest of "the stronger."

Once again, the governing idea is the same. There are no such things as "good," "bad," "right" or "wrong." They are merely names which are given to different kinds of conduct and they vary in their meaning according to the different ends which in different communities the kinds of conduct in question are designed to serve. Thus in communities where food is short, it is thought to be right to kill off unnecessary babies. In our own community this is thought to be wicked. Since in our own society property is very highly valued but kindness and gentleness are less valued, a man will receive a heavy sentence for stealing a joint of meat from a butcher's shop or even poaching a salmon, but a much lighter one for beating his wife black and blue. In short, people will have different views about what is good and right according to their desires, interests, values and circumstances.

The distinctive thing about Thrasymachus's theory is his insistence that the only desires, interests, values and circumstances which have to be taken into account in determining what is to be called good, right, just and so on, are those of the governing class.

This brings me back to the use which is made in this connection of religion, a point which was reached at the close of the first line of argument.\* The first line of argument ended up with the hint that the doctrines of religion were appropriated and exploited

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\* See page 16 above.

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by society to make the consequences of acting rightly—that is to say, when you translate into the language which this point of view demands, the consequences of adopting those courses of action which conduce to the benefit of society—more desirable, and the consequences of acting wrongly, that is to say, the consequences of adopting those courses of action which are harmful to society, more painful. Be kind, unselfish, compassionate, just, and think of your neighbour more than of yourself, and you will go to Heaven and enjoy an eternity of happiness. So says religion.

Naturally everybody, in so far as he believes in the teaching of religion, does his best to be brave, honest, kind, unselfish and the rest, and tries, as far as he can, to help his neighbour—just the sort of thing that society needs to hold the community together.

Be selfish, predatory and cowardly; play for your own hand and think only of your own advantage and you will go to Hell and suffer an eternity of torment. Again, just what society wants. People are frightened out of anti-social and into social conduct by the promises and threats of religion. Is it any wonder, runs the argument, that European governments should have adopted Christianity and made the most of its teaching? How useful is that teaching when States want to make their citizens act in ways that conduce to the survival of the State and, once again, the familiar argument that religion encourages conduct which helps a society to survive is barbed by Thrasymachus's distinctive addition that this is also the kind of conduct which tends to keep the rich, rich, the powerful, powerful, and the poor, poor.

For what does the Christian religion teach? That

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it is a man's duty to be humble, meek and obedient. He is also particularly blessed, if he is poor; so much so that, while to be rich and powerful is a bad passport to God's favour and will probably lead to the most unpleasant consequences in the hereafter, to be poor and oppressed in this world is a good preparation for eternal happiness in the next. Think, for example, of the implications of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, or of the remark which compares the difficulty of the rich in getting into Heaven with that of a camel in passing through the eye of a needle.

The rich, of course, evince no disposition to act on these arguments, by which they are very far from being taken in. They see them for what they are, mere devices for keeping the poor in order by promising them heavenly compensations in the next world for the champagne and cigars they are missing in this one, a convenient doctrine which enables the rich to monopolise the champagne and cigars.

Thus, religion, like morality, is in Thrasymachus's phrase "the interest of the stronger." Listen, for example, to an exceptionally clear minded representative of "the stronger," who felt himself at the time sufficiently sure of his position to be able to "spill the beans." "What is it," asked the Emperor Napoleon, "that makes the poor man think it quite natural that there are fires in my palace while he is dying of cold? That I have ten coats in my wardrobe while he goes naked? That at each of my meals enough is served to feed his family for a week? It is simply religion which tells him that in another life I shall be only his equal and that he actually has more chance of being happy there than I."

Or, to put the same argument into modern terms,

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listen for a moment to the argument from Shaw's *Major Barbara* between the rich armament manufacturer, Undershaft, and the Oxford Professor of Greek, Cusins. Undershaft is trying to persuade Cusins that the Salvation Army only exists by permission of the rich who, indeed, do their best to encourage it because of the effect of its doctrines upon the poor.

“ Undershaft: All religious organisations exist by selling themselves to the rich.

Cusins: Not the Army. That is the Church of the poor.

Undershaft: All the more reason for buying it.

Cusins: I don't think you quite know what the Army does for the poor.

Undershaft: Oh, yes, I do. It draws their teeth: that is enough for me—as a man of business—

Cusins: Nonsense. It makes them sober.

Undershaft: I prefer sober workmen. The profits are larger.

Cusins: —honest—

Undershaft: Honest workmen are the most economical.

Cusins: —attached to their homes—

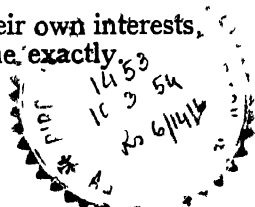
Undershaft: So much the better: they will put up with anything sooner than change their job.

Cusins: —happy—

Undershaft: An invaluable safeguard against revolution.

Cusins: —unselfish—

Undershaft: Indifferent to their own interests, which suits me exactly.





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Cusins: —with their thoughts on  
heavenly things—

Undershaft: And not on Trade Unionism nor  
Socialism. Excellent.

Cusins: (Revolted) You really are an infernal  
old rascal."

Such are some of the arguments which have been advanced to show that what men mean by religion, including everything that they call holy and righteous, the dictates of their consciences, their love of God and their endeavours to serve mankind are nothing but dodges designed by the governing classes in order to secure *their* position and further *their* interests. This brings me to an important political consequence of the doctrine.

### 3. HOBBS AND DICTATORSHIP

In the seventeenth century the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, wrote a famous book, *The Leviathan*, which carried to their logical conclusions the political implications of the view we have been considering. He, too, adopted the Social Contract theory of the origin of society, representing men who once lived in a state of nature, that is to say, in a condition *preceding* the formation of society, as preying upon one another like beasts in the jungle. As a consequence the life of man was, in Hobbes's famous phrase, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." With a view to putting an end to this condition men came together and formed society, which was brought into existence as the result of a definite compact or contract by its participants to obey the laws and surrender the right to prey upon one's neighbour.

Once again, as in the account given by the speaker in Plato's *Republic*, man is conceived of as a being who is by nature non-moral and accepts the

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restraints of morality reluctantly as a second best to escape from the misery and insecurity associated with life in his natural state. Hobbes particularly emphasises the insecurity of the "state of nature," and man, he thinks, came into society primarily in order to achieve security. Now how, he asks, can security best be achieved? The answer is, by giving up all one's natural rights, including one's "natural right" to "do injustice," and investing them in society. Society thus became a sort of repository in which all the rights and powers which belong to men by nature were dumped. But what, after all, is society, and how could it receive these rights and powers? Society, or the State, as Hobbes called it, is, after all, only a figment or abstraction, unless it can be represented by one or more persons, and Hobbes's view was that, bearing in mind the overriding need for security, a single person was best. Hobbes, then, conceived of men as vesting their rights and powers in a single person, the Sovereign, who stood for and, as it were, represented them all. The Sovereign, then, embodied men's overmastering desire for security whose fulfilment, Hobbes thought, could only be guaranteed when all men gave up their "natural right" to "commit injustice." Since the Sovereign could only fulfil the purpose for which he was created, that, namely, of guaranteeing security, if he were supreme and his powers unchallenged, it was necessary to endow him with absolute powers. Thus, according to Hobbes, nobody would or could revolt against the Sovereign. For to revolt against him would be to contradict the very purpose for which men came into society, the purpose, namely, of gaining security. Thus Hobbes proceeds to deduce from the fact that man is naturally non-moral the necessity for

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absolute dictatorship in the political sphere. The modern dictatorships, both Fascist and Communist, which appear to take a similar view as to man's basic original nature, appear also to have reached a similar political conclusion. Before, however, I come to them, there is one more development of the view that morality is not natural to man but is something man-made and, therefore, artificial which deserves description because of its great speculative interest.

### 4. NIETZSCHE AND THE SUPERMAN

Nietzsche, a German philosopher, writing in the late nineteenth century, also denied the *natural* morality of man. Like the other writers at whom we have glanced, he considered morality to be an artificial by-product of circumstances; it was, for him, an expression of man's weakness. Most men are not after all, very determined, very able or very efficient; on the contrary, they are poor, nervous little chaps wanting and for the most part leading quiet and uneventful lives. But there are always a few gifted with determination, will-power and ambition which lift them above the general "herd" of mankind.

The word "herd" closely expresses Nietzsche's conception, for he thought of the strong man, strong, that is to say, mentally and morally as well as physically, rather after the manner of a wolf liable to prey upon the timid herd of undistinguished sheep. Faced with the danger from the wolves the sheep do two things. First, they invent morality which is designed to protect the weak members of the herd against the strong, determined individuals by dubbing most of the things which the strong want to do and have the will and capacity to carry through, wicked. The weak, for example, don't

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break in and steal; they haven't the "guts." Therefore, stealing is wicked. The weak can't manage more than one wife and are always fearful lest somebody should make off with her; therefore, love affairs outside the marriage tie are wicked and polygamy is very wicked. Again, the ordinary man of the herd is in no sense an outstanding personality. He can't dominate his fellows even if he would; the best and the most that he can do in the world is to work hard, attend to his duty and co-operate with others. Therefore, he preaches the virtues of co-operation and praises the qualities which make it easy: unselfishness, diligence, consideration for others, willingness to sink one's own interests in those of the organisation to which one belongs. At the same time he denounces the dominating man, who plays for his own hand and uses other people as raw material for the fulfilment of his own ambitions.

And so—and here we come to politics—the men of the herd are driven to make the most of the one advantage which they possess over the superior man—numbers. There are, after all, many, all too many, like the herd-man, for *he* is the average. Therefore, he can be sure that his desires, fears and feelings will be those of the majority. Consequently, he invents the system known as democracy which is the perfect political expression of the mentality of the average man, since it is a system in which numbers count and everything is decided by majority voting. Democracy, therefore, like morality, takes its rise from men's needs and weaknesses. Like morality it is a device whereby the average man seeks to compensate for his feeling of inferiority to the superior man and to protect and strengthen his own weakness in the face of that superiority.

What of the superior men? In order to answer

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this question Nietzsche had recourse to biological conceptions. Taking the idea of evolution seriously, he thought of man as a creature who had been slowly evolved through a number of traceable stages from lower forms of life. But the force of evolution that had produced man would not, he thought, stop with man, why should it? It would, Nietzsche believed, seek to go beyond man, as men had succeeded in going beyond the animals. Nietzsche therefore, thought of evolution as a sort of dynamic almost conscious force which was trying to evolve something greater than man, a being whom he called the Superman.

What was the Superman to be like? The weakness of Nietzsche's view was that he was never able to present any clear answer to this question; nor, indeed, has anybody else. It is a fascinating speculation to consider what kind of creature will figure as the next item on the evolutionary programme. What, in other words, will a being be like who stands to us in the same evolutionary relation as that in which we stand to the apes? Fascinating, but bootless; we don't know and it may be that we can't even conceive such a being, any more than the great apes could have conceived the nature of the being who was to come after and to supersede them. Hence it would be unfair to demand from Nietzsche any very exact description of the coming Superman. But on one point Nietzsche was quite clear. The Superman wouldn't be bound by the rules of what we call morality. This, of course, follows from his general idea of what morality really was, namely, the creation of the weak creatures of the herd designed to defend them against the greater talents and stronger will-power of superior individuals. Clearly, then, if you were yourself a superior

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individual, you wouldn't need or be bound by morality. For if the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, instead of being part of the nature of things, was merely a difference invented by certain weak human beings for their own purposes, then, being strong yourself, you would feel under no obligation to acknowledge *their* conception of good or to consider yourself bound by *their* rule of right. On the contrary, you would show your superiority by giving evidence of your ability to flout the rules and "to get away with it," just as in a school it sometimes happens that a boy who is stronger and has more will-power than others "gets away with" conduct which would bring down retribution upon the head of anybody else. The strong man, not being bound by the laws of the herd, makes his own; in fact he is a law unto himself and can do anything that he wills. All that is needed to set morality at naught is superiority of talent and courage and strength of will and of mind.

This is, in effect, to transfer to the sphere of personal conduct, the doctrine that "might is right," which we have so often seen illustrated in the conduct of States. The doctrine of the non-moral Superman springs from the same source as the other views which we have outlined in this chapter; that is to say, it takes its rise from the conviction that there is nothing either natural, fundamental or universal about morality. On the contrary, the ideas of "right" and "wrong," "good" and "bad," "duty" and "ought," are artificial, being man-made conventions designed to serve man's needs and to further his ends.

### 5. MODERN POLITICAL APPLICATIONS

From the conclusion of the lines of argument in sections (3) and (4) it will be seen that the view

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that man is by nature non-moral has a tendency to be associated with the beliefs and practices of dictatorial governments. This tendency has received striking witness in our time.

### FASCISM.

Consider, for example, Fascism as it developed in Germany. The Nazis held—and there is good philosophical authority for the view—that the State is rather like a living person. Just as the living person is both more than the sum of his separate organs, limbs and thoughts, so the State is more than the sum of its separate individual members. The notion is important and deserves a word or two of explanation.

The rather mystical idea of the State as a sort of person is based upon a supposed likeness between the body politic and the living human body which runs right through philosophy. It is, I think, obvious that the living human being is not just the arithmetical sum total of the separate organs and parts of his body. Lay them out as you might do on a dissecting table and then put them together again and the result would not be a living person, if only because when so put together, they would be just a collection of separate arms, legs, head, stomach, lungs and so on. They would not be a single living whole. This is not to say that the living human body is not the arithmetical sum total of its parts; it is, but it is also more than that. So, too, with man's mind and personality. He *has* ideas, emotions, desires, passions and thoughts; but he himself isn't any one of these and, most people would agree, he isn't their sum total. In other words, if you took a bundle of ideas, emotions, desires, passions, thoughts and so on and added them together, you still wouldn't have a man's mind or personality.

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In just the same way, according to Fascist and Nazi theories, the State is not just the sum total of the human beings who compose it, but is like a living organism in being more than their arithmetical sum. Like a human organism, it, too, has a personality, a will and a purpose of its own, a conception to which politicians seek to give expression by such phrases as "*The State's* historic mission," "*The State's* sacred destiny," "*The State's* history," "*The State's* objectives," "*The State's* policy." Now just as the organs of the human body have no purposes apart from those of the body, so that it would be absurd to speak of the purposes of the stomach or the head as if they were somehow different from those of the body to which the stomach and the head belong, and just as they have no rights apart from the body—you couldn't, after all, speak of a lung's "rights" being infringed by the man who got pneumonia or T.B., or a stomach's "rights" being injured by a man who ate too much—so, on this view, the individual has no purposes and rights apart from those of the State to which he belongs. His sole duty is to serve it to the best of his ability in the way for which his talents and abilities fit him, and what that way will be, *it* and not *he* determines.

If, then, we are to use the language of morality, the word "good" means, on this view, that which the State considers to be useful to it, and the word "right" that which will further the State's aims and fulfil its purposes. As for the notions of "duty" and "ought," they are covered quite simply by the obligation to do whatever the State commands.

This, it is obvious, destroys the idea of morality as we commonly understand it, for morality, as



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commonly understood, would insist that while some of the things that the State does are right, others are wrong. For example, it is wrong, most people would say, to break treaties solemnly embarked upon; right to fight in defence of such treaties.

But on the view that we are considering, the State can do no wrong, for this view is in agreement with Hobbes (see Section 3 above) in holding that there is no such thing as morality; there is only self-interest. It follows that if a particular course of action can be shown to be in the interests of the State, and if the State has the power to pursue that course, then the course in question is necessarily right, since "might is right."

The conclusion is also in agreement with that of Nietzsche (see Section 4 above) that "the stronger" are not bound by the morality which the weaker acknowledge, merely because they, the weaker, have invented it.

Finally, since the individual's duty is bound up with, is, indeed, identical with his obedience to the State, it will be "right" for him to further the State's aims and purposes on all occasions. Therefore, it will be "right" for him to help the State to break a treaty if it so decides, "right," therefore, for him to help it to do what is normally called wrong. This conclusion has, in fact, been drawn, this conception of the individual's duty enforced by States in our time which, no doubt, is one of the reasons why the level of morality which prevails in the relations of States both to one another and to their own citizens is so much lower than that which prevails among individuals—but I must remind myself that I have no right to use such a word as morality in this connection for, as I have said, on

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this view, no such thing as morality in any true sense of the word can exist.

### COMMUNISM.

Now let us look at Communism which reaches very much the same conclusion, though for different reasons. I cannot at the end of a chapter embark upon a general account of the Marxist philosophy which requires a chapter, nay a book, to itself. It is sufficient for my purpose to indicate how it, too, both assumes and builds on this same conviction that morality is not something embedded in the nature of things but is made by man to satisfy his needs and meet his circumstances.

Marxism is based broadly on two ideas. The first is that the kind of society in which men live is, in the last resort, determined by the way in which they satisfy their fundamental needs, that is to say, their need for food, drink, clothing, shelter and so on. If they satisfy these needs by hunting, you get one sort of society; if by agriculture, another; if by the manual labour of individual craftsmen, another; if by the work of large bodies of men operating machines in a factory, yet another; and so on. Each kind of society has its own distinctive structure, its own sets of laws, its own codes of morals, its own way of life.

The second main idea is that every society that has existed hitherto has been divided into broadly two classes. One class gets hold of and maintains a monopoly of the materials by means of which men's wants are satisfied, the land, the factories, the mines, the workshops and the tools; it has the monopoly, as Marx put it, of the "means of production." The other class, finding no other way of satisfying its fundamental needs, since all the means

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of production are in the hands of the first class, sells its labour to the first class in order that it may make use of the means of production, that is to say, till the land, labour in the mines and factories, operate the machines. In return for its labour it receives a wage; not a very large wage, since most of the profits of its labour are skimmed off and appropriated by the class which owns the means of production, but just enough to keep its members alive and sufficiently contented not to revolt. Thus, the so-called "class basis of society" means that all the societies that have ever existed (prior to Communism) consist of a comparatively small body of owners and capitalists living on the proceeds of the labour of a very much larger body of dispossessed slaves or serfs or peasants or "wage slaves," as Marxists call the workers in factories.

Now not only does each kind of society have its own distinctive laws and its own distinctive moral code which, as we have seen, are determined in the long run by the nature of the means which men adopt to satisfy their fundamental needs, the laws and the morals are such as serve the interests of the governing class. In point of fact, they are deliberately designed to serve those interests by prescribing those things to be just, good and right which it suits the rulers that the masses should *think* to be just, good and right. Thus, according to Communism, every society that has hitherto existed has been from the point of view of morals a living illustration of the truth of the doctrine of Thrasymachus (see Section 2 above). It is no wonder, then, on this view that in a capitalist society we should find an exaggerated respect for property inculcated by opinion and enforced by the law, the denunciation of anybody who tries to change the class basis

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of society, with its unjust division of wealth and power, as a wicked agitator, and the exploitation of Christianity in order to produce a respect for all the desirable virtues, obedience, thrift, sobriety, diligence and contentedness. Thus, once again, morality, according to Communism, is not natural to man but is artificial, being made by each governing class to serve its own interests and impose its interests upon the rest.

I am not here concerned to criticise this view—though, indeed, I am very far from agreeing with it—any more than I propose to comment on the general philosophy described in this chapter, the philosophy, namely, which asserts that man is by nature non-moral, of which this view is a particular application. My *rôle* in this chapter has been that of an expositor merely. I have tried to expound the view that some philosophers have put forward to the effect that man is by nature non-moral, identifying myself as far as possible for the purposes of exposition, with the arguments of those who profess it. This kind of view recurs from time to time in the history of philosophy, and whenever it has done so it has provoked comment and criticism. Some of these criticisms will be considered in succeeding chapters in which I shall outline certain positive conclusions that different thinkers, chiefly the great Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, have advanced in regard to the nature of morality. Examples of these conclusions and the arguments upon which they are based will be considered in Chapters II, IV and V. In Chapter III I shall describe and discuss a special variant of the philosophy set out in this chapter, according to which the only possible object of human desire is pleasure.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NATURE OF GOODNESS

HOWEVER BAD man's practice may have been, it is rarely that he has been content to *profess* badness, that is to say, to preach immorality in theory. Nor are there many who would subscribe to the repudiation of morality, whether frank or disguised, entailed by the theories discussed in the last chapter. Let us, then, see what answers philosophers have suggested to some of the questions there raised, and the positions which they have taken up with a view to refuting these theories.

One of the most persistent doctrines in ethical philosophy, that is to say the branch of philosophy which is concerned with what is good and how we ought to behave, is the doctrine that goodness or virtue is a kind of knowledge. A good man, on this view, is a man who knows something, something that the bad man does not know. The doctrine is particularly connected with the name of the great Athenian philosopher, Socrates, who lived in the second half of the fifth century B.C. and whose thoughts have been recorded in the dialogues of the most famous of his pupils, Plato.

The following are some examples of the way in which the doctrine was expounded by Socrates in detail.

#### COURAGE

Let us take an example of what most people would

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regard as a virtue, courage let us say. Now everybody is afraid of some things, of being hurt, for instance, or of being badly wounded. Let us suppose that a line of soldiers is manning a trench; suddenly the order comes to leave the trench and advance up a hillside along whose top is ranged a line of enemy machine-guns spraying bullets down the slope. It is nonsense to say that the brave man is not afraid; anybody in such circumstances *would* be afraid. To flinch away from the mouth of a cannon belching shot and shell or a machine-gun spraying bullets is natural. Nevertheless, the brave man leaves the trench, goes forward up the slope and, if he is lucky, captures the enemy's guns. Why does he? Because his fear of something else is greater than his fear even of the bullets and the pain of wounds. What else? We can answer this question by asking what are the considerations by which the mind of the brave man is influenced—the fear of running away, the fear of being seen to run away, the fear of a reputation for cowardice, the fear of letting his regiment down, the fear of deserting his comrades, the fear, in a word, of doing what is disgraceful. And if you like to be cynical you can add to these intangible fears the fear of being court-martialled and shot for desertion in face of the enemy. For all armies have taken care to invent systems of discipline which are designed to ensure that men will do difficult and dangerous things, which they would in normal circumstances shrink from doing, through fear of punishment if they do not. (As some wit put it, discipline is a device for substituting the certainty of being shot if you don't go "over the top" for the possibility of being shot if you do.)

What is the conclusion? That the difference

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between the brave man and the coward is a difference in the matter of knowledge. One of them, the brave man, knows what he *ought* to be afraid of; the other, the coward, does not. Or, as Socrates put it, one of them knows what is "truly formidable"; the other makes the mistake of thinking that something, pain or wounds, is a thing that ought to be feared, is, that is to say "truly formidable," when it isn't really. The first man, then, knows something of which the second is ignorant.

### SELF-CONTROL

Or take self-control or "temperance," as the Greeks called it. It is obvious, is it not, that though self-control is a virtue, it is not the mark of a virtuous man to control *every* part of his nature. The reason, the will, the conscience, for example—these, it is obvious, ought not to be controlled precisely because they ought to be in control, keeping the passions and desires in check. Let us consider an example; suppose that you feel that you want to take your girl to the pictures but know that you *ought* to stay at home and read for your examination. The first motive belongs to the part of our nature which is concerned with feeling or desire, the second to the part which is concerned with reason and will, reason which holds before you the importance of passing the examination and the long-term benefits to be derived therefrom, and will which reason employs to suppress the cinema-going desire in the interests of the good of the whole. Or suppose you are considering whether to have a cold bath on a cold morning. Desire says "no." How forbidding and repulsive the water looks and feels. But something else, will, or the sense of shame, overcomes desire and in you go.

Now most people would say that this second

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set of elements in our nature ought to be in control of the first, and ought not to be controlled by them. Thus when we speak of a self-controlled person what we mean is one who keeps his emotions and desires in subjection to his reason and his will, one who does not, as we say, let his temper run away with him. Self-control, then, does not consist in controlling all the sides of our nature, but some of them only; or, more precisely, in the self-controlled man some elements are in control while others are controlled. Now being in a position to know *which* should do the controlling and which should be subject to the controllers means that you have a piece of knowledge. Hence the self-controlled or temperate man knows something that the licentious or intemperate man, the man who lets his passions "rip," does not know, and once again, virtue is seen to be a question of knowledge.

### PLEASURES

Take one more example. Many philosophers have held that pleasure is the object or end of existence.\* Some have maintained that we all of us do as a matter of actual fact desire our own pleasure and nothing else; others have held that we can desire other things but *ought* only to desire pleasure, since pleasure is the only thing worth having, is, as the philosophers have put it, the only good. This belief will be examined in the next chapter. For the present I am concerned with it only in so far as it affords a further illustration of the view that virtue is knowledge.

Let us make a distinction between means and ends. Some things like success or power or what we call "a good time" we desire for themselves;\*\*

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\* See the next chapter for an account of this view.

\*\* This view also will be further discussed in Chapter Five.



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others, because they are means to the things we desire for themselves, for example, money, which is in itself nothing but bits of paper and metal, but is for most of us an indispensable condition of our having "a good time." Some means are unpleasant, like medicine which is a means to health, or having a tooth out, which is a means to relief from pain; others may be pleasant, like shooting rabbits, which is both fun in itself and a means of replenishing the larder; or going for a swim or a ride which are both agreeable in themselves and are means to health.

Let us call those things which are means to other things useful. Now of the things that are useful, that is to say, which help to bring about some one or more of the things that we desire for themselves, some will be agreeable, others will be disagreeable. If the view that the only thing which in the long run we desire is pleasure is correct, some useful things will be good both as means and ends, others as means only. A third class will be pleasant without being useful. Take as an example of the first class the mastery of some difficult art or sport like skating or ski-ing. This is something which is pleasant in itself, but it is also a means to the further pleasures of winning the competition or of showing off; it is, therefore, both pleasant and useful. Practising scales on the piano is an example of the second class. As an example of the third class consider drug-taking. Drug-taking is undoubtedly pleasant, but if proceeded with, is apt to reduce you to such a physical and mental wreck that you cannot take pleasure in anything else, since more and more of the drug is found to be necessary, if you are to derive continued pleasure from drug-taking, drug-taking, then, is pleasant but not useful.

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### BOASTING

Or take, as a further example of the third class, boasting; the object of boasting is to make other people think well of you, to think you, in fact, a very fine fellow. *You* own this or that; *you* got the goal; *you* got there first; *you* beat the others, and so, presumably, what a fine chap *you* are and what a lot of admiration *you* deserve. Also *your* country, *your* school, *your* house at the school, *your* team, even *your* family, is better than anybody else's. Why? Presumably because you happen to belong to it.

Boasting is natural to all of us, especially when we are young and it is a very great pleasure. We presently find out, however, that instead of having the effect which is wished and intended boasting tends to produce the opposite effect. "Conceited ass," people say, "He's got swelled head," and they despise him for it and try to take him down a peg or two. All this we have dinned into us at school, so that by the time we have grown up we have most of us learned not to boast; at least not to boast too blatantly, except when we have been drinking, when the carefully built up inhibitions of our training and education are weakened or completely removed by the influence of drink and we let our natural instincts "rip," and boast unashamedly. As most of those who hear us are in the same condition, little harm is done. From what has been said it will be seen that boasting, though pleasant, is not a means to further pleasure; is not therefore useful.

Assuming, then, that pleasure is, as the Greeks would say "the good," that is, the thing we all want and value, and the only thing that we all want and value, we reach the conclusion that some things will

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be useful to us and some useless. The useful will be those which promote pleasure, the useless those which do not. The useful will be themselves divided into two classes, those which are pleasant in themselves as well as being useful, and those which are neutral or even painful. If, then, we wish to pursue and to realise more and more of that which is good—and this, we must suppose, is what all good men wish to do—and if we further identify the good with pleasure, it would seem that knowledge once again is required, knowledge, first, to enable us to determine those things which are in fact most productive of pleasure in themselves, and knowledge, in the second place, to enable us to distinguish among those things that are useful, the agreeable from the disagreeable.\*

### SOME CRITICISMS

To the doctrine that virtue is itself a kind of knowledge there are many objections. For example, we want to know knowledge of what? If we say of what is good, of "the good" as the Greeks put it—and no other answer has ever been suggested—we are using what is in fact a circular argument, since virtue, i.e. the good, which on this view is knowledge, turns out to be knowledge of "the good."

Secondly, if one virtue, say courage, is a kind of knowledge, being knowledge of the good, so too is any other virtue, say generosity. Now most men are a mixture of virtues and of vices. "Generous," we say, "but dissolute"; "honest but mean"; "selfish but affectionate." But if we adopt Socrates's formula such commonplace remarks apparently involve us in saying, first, that the man has knowledge of the good because he is generous

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\* What Plato has to say on this topic will be considered in Chapter Five.

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or honest or affectionate, and secondly, that he does not have it because he is dissolute or mean or selfish; in other words, it involves a contradiction in terms.

But the most serious objection is of a different kind. Let us suppose that we take the notion of "good" seriously, that is to say, as having a meaning which cannot be resolved into the meaning of any other word or words; then some things, we shall maintain, really are good in a sense in which others are bad, and we shall further maintain that they are so in their own right, that is to say, independently of what anybody thinks or has thought about them. Now most of us, I think, believe in our hearts that this is in fact the case, and we are convinced that it is the case even though we also know that human beings have, in fact, held the widest variety of opinions as to which things are good and which things are not. (Yet in spite of this wide diversity of opinion about many things, most of us would I imagine, agree that cruelty is bad and that we ought not, for example, to torture defenceless creatures.)

### THE TWO DIFFICULTIES OF LEADING A GOOD LIFE

Now those who try to live a good life seem to encounter two main difficulties. The first is the difficulty of finding out what are the things that are good and what are the things, therefore, that they ought to do. That is the difficulty which chiefly concerned the Greek philosophers leading Socrates to say that virtue is a kind of knowledge, and it is the difficulty with which we have hitherto been concerned in this chapter. As a stock example of this kind of difficulty we may take the problem that confronts Hamlet. He believes that his uncle has killed his father, but he is not quite sure. What, then, in the circumstances ought he to do about it? Wherein does his duty lie?

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But there is another difficulty: we may know what we ought to do, but lack the will-power to enable us to do it. The wanting to do A when we know that we ought to do B is, perhaps, the central problem of right conduct. Thus, I *want* to take my girl to the pictures, but I *ought* to stay at home and work. I *want* to pinch the other fellow's knife, wireless, motor-bike or whatever it may be, and I think that I could probably get away with it; but I know that it would be *wrong* to do so. I know that I *ought* to get up early and have a cold bath before breakfast, but I *want* to lie in bed.

How familiar the opposition between these alternatives is. Now, what is involved here is not a question of not knowing; it is a question of not wanting to do what we know we ought to do. "The good I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do" says the Christian, or, as the small boy put it, even more forcibly:—"Of course, I know the difference between right and wrong; but I like wrong best." In these cases it is not lack of knowledge, but weakness of will that is the trouble. We lack the will-power to do what we ought to do because the temptation of pleasure, or what is sometimes called the "weakness of the flesh" is too strong for us. Now, in the overcoming of this second difficulty which faces those who want to live a good life, the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge seems to offer little help.

### MAN AS A DETERMINED BEING

#### KANT'S DOCTRINE OF FREEDOM.

I turn, then, by way of contrast to another doctrine about right living, a doctrine which is no less famous in the history of philosophy than that of Socrates, that of the German eighteenth century

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philosopher Kant. Kant's theory about the nature of virtue is not easy to understand, apart from his theory about the nature of the universe as a whole. This, unfortunately, is extremely difficult. I shall, therefore, here concern myself only with one aspect of what Kant has to say on the subject of goodness.

Kant emphasised the fact that, so far as the greater part of our experience is concerned, we are not free but determined. That is to say, we don't choose our experiences; we simply cannot help but have the experiences which we do have.

So far as our sensations are concerned, this is, I imagine, pretty obvious. If I put sugar in my mouth I cannot help but have a sensation of sweetness; if I prick my hand with a pin I cannot help but have a sensation of pain; if somebody nearby blows a trumpet I cannot help but have a sensation of a loud brassy noise; if I look at a pillar-box I cannot help but have a sensation of redness; and so on. "Ah, yes," you may say, "but you can within limits choose what sensations you will have in the sense that it is *you* who decides whether to put sugar in your mouth or look at the pillar-box or not." But even this, it seems, is open to question. In fact, if the considerations on which Kant laid stress are valid, the decisions I make in such matters are not within my control any more than the sensations which follow upon them.

Kant asks us to look at man from the point of view of the sciences. Take any science you like, he says in effect, and see what it has to tell us about human beings. You will find it extremely difficult in the light of its teaching to avoid the conclusion that man cannot help feeling, thinking, wishing and doing what he does in fact feel, think, wish and do.

Take, for example, the science of biology. It

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represents man as a member of a particular species which has evolved by a process whose broad lines are traceable from more primitive species. He has the tastes, the desires, wants and capacities proper to the species to which he belongs. For example, they resemble more closely those of an ape than those of a bird, those of a bird, than those of a fish. Quite a large slice of his life, all that part of it which is connected with being born, sleeping, eating, drinking, sex and dying is, as it were, determined for him simply by reason of his being a man.

At this point the anthropologist steps in and proceeds to exhibit man as a member of a community belonging to what we call a particular culture or civilisation. If it is a primitive culture, he has the beliefs, fears and superstitions appropriate to his tribe. His life is regulated by a complicated and elaborate system of ritual and taboo. What it is right and wrong for him to do, what he may touch and not touch, what things he will regard as being holy and sacred, how he ought to behave when brought into contact with women or when confronted by a member of an enemy tribe—all these things and many more are determined for him by the customs of the tribe to which he belongs. Read such a book as Margaret Mead's *Male and Female*, and you will see how completely the savage is subject to his community.

Nor, if he is a member of what we call civilisation, are the influences brought to bear on him any less powerful, though they may be less obvious. I, for example, am a child of my age; a member of twentieth century western civilisation. When I was young, I was exposed to the powerful influence of my family; a little later the habits and precepts, first of school, and then of University, were brought

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to bear upon me. Since I grew up, I have been subject to the influences, the standards and ways of thought which we call public opinion, the opinion of the middle class in society to which I belong. All these influences have been playing upon me continuously ever since I was a baby, and my feelings, tastes, desires, ideas about good form, conceptions of what "is done" and what "is not done" have all, to a very large extent, been formed for me by my community; they are, therefore, different from what they would have been if I had been a member of a Negro community in America; different as a member of the middle class in England from those of a member of the working class, say, in France; different as a member of a western democracy from those of a citizen of the U.S.S.R. For example, having been born in a bedroom in London, I was taught to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that I ought to try and love my neighbour, and that it is right to marry only one wife. Had I been born in a bedroom in Baghdad, I should have believed that Allah is God, that Mahomet is his prophet and that it is right to marry as many wives as I could afford to keep. My beliefs and values then, are formed not by me, but for me; and since, as a man thinks so will he act, I behave accordingly.

Or take physiology. It is not difficult to show how much of a man's character, and how much, then, of his mental life depends upon his bodily characteristics. Some writers have gone so far as to distinguish a number of separate bodily types, for example, the long thin type, the short thick type, and so on, and to associate them with particular mental types; thus members of the first bodily type are given to melancholy; they feel deeply and are



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capable of prodigies of endurance, while those of the second are optimistic, good tempered and rapidly tire. Such correlations between the characteristics of the body and mind have been worked out in great detail. Again, we have learned how closely both physical and mental characteristics are dependent upon the secretions of certain glands. If, for example, a child has a deficiency of thyroid he grows a head like a cauliflower and is incapable of doing mental arithmetic ; an excess of the secretions of the adrenal gland situated near the kidneys is associated with an excessive timidity. Artificially increase the amount of thyroid in the system and the child's head shrinks and he can do his sums; diminish the amount of adrenalin and he is no longer a prey to empty fears.

### TEACHING OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Above all, perhaps, it is by his past psychology, that is to say, by what has been going on in his consciousness throughout his life, that a man's nature at any given moment is most manifestly determined. Some hold that the origin of all our wishes, hopes, fears, thoughts and desires is located in that part of us which is unconscious. Find out, they say, what is going on in a person's unconscious, and you will be in a position to deduce what is going on in his consciousness and accordingly to predict his behaviour. It is, of course, the case that our unconscious urges, as they are called, get transformed and made presentable on their journey from unconsciousness to consciousness, so that they may appear in consciousness in a great variety of different guises, as when a man's unconscious desire to run off with his next door neighbour's wife appears in consciousness as a sudden dislike of pickled walnuts. But the fact that they may come in an unexpected

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shape wearing heavy disguises does not mean that the contents of consciousness may not be *wholly* formed by the unconscious impulses and desires from which they spring.

As to what are called the will, the reason and the conscience, the elements in our make-up which, as we saw above\* are normally regarded as being responsible for the control of the appetites and desires, they too, on this view, can be presented as conscious versions—"sublimations" is the technical word used—of unconscious impulses and desires; for example, the desire to stand well with the neighbours, or a feeling of guilt at offending against the accepted moral code of one's society. Now we do not know what is going on in the unconscious; if we did, it would not be unconscious. Therefore, we cannot control its manifestations in consciousness; therefore, what reason thinks and what the will wills are outside our control; we are not free but determined, determined, as it were, by ourselves.

### SELF-DETERMINISM

This psychological version of determinism is well summed up by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, in what has come to be called the doctrine of "self-determinism." Let us, said Aristotle, take an adult man with a formed character; we will suppose it to be a good character. How did it come to be formed? Aristotle's answer is that it was formed by the performance of good actions, since it is the kind of life we live that gradually builds up our characters. How did those good actions come to be performed? The answer is, they were the natural expressions of the character from which they proceeded, since a man cannot after all act "out of character." How, then, did the character come to

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\* See pages 35, 36.

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be formed from which the good actions proceeded? The answer is that it in its turn was gradually built up by the actions which preceded *it*. And how did *those* actions come to be performed? They, too, were the natural outcome of the character which found expression in them. In this way we can go back and back showing how actions proceed from character which, in its turn, is built up by preceding actions, until we come to the character or the potentiality for a character which the individual possessed when he was first born into the world. Now, for this, unless we believe in reincarnation, we cannot hold him responsible. Nor can we hold him responsible for the environment in which he is placed at birth. His first actions are the consequence of the impact of that first environment upon his initial character or potentiality for a character, being, in fact, his response to that environment. For these first actions, then, he is not responsible, nor, then, is he for the character which he gradually forms as a result of doing them. We now retrace our steps, showing how at every stage actions form character which, in its turn, expresses itself in further actions, until we reached the formed character, the character of the good man, from which we started. At all stages in the process man's character is determined by the actions which have built it up and determines in its turn the actions which proceed from it. At no point in the analysis is there any loophole for the introduction of freedom.

### KANT'S INSISTENCE ON MORAL FREEDOM

I have been giving examples drawn from a number of different sources of the ways in which a man's life and thoughts and actions can be shown to be determined. What we think, feel, desire, hope, fear; our tastes, our values, our temperament, our

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disposition—all these, it seems, are formed not by us but for us. They constitute our nature, and though we appear to be able to change our nature, the wish to change it no less than the energy with which we succeed in changing it are also given to us as parts of the nature we wish to change.

It is time to return to Kant. Having made due allowance for all these considerations, he proceeds to point out something else. All that has been said hitherto applies to what people feel and want and desire and think, and it is indeed true that in respect of so feeling, desiring wanting and thinking they do seem to be determined by forces outside themselves. But in addition to what I want to do, there is also my conviction of what I ought to do. Now this, according to Kant, has nothing to do with my wants. On the contrary, it often, in fact usually, expresses itself in direct opposition to them. I *want*, we say, to do so and so, want, in the example I gave above, to take my girl friend to the cinema, but I *ought*, I feel, to stay at home and work for my examination, or look after my mother or whoever it may be who is ill.

I am hungry and *want* all the sausages, but there are three of us at the table and I *ought* only to take a third of them. And so on *ad infinitum*. How familiar the opposition is; it confronts us every day, sometimes, it almost seems, at every moment of the day.

Now this opposition, the opposition between want or wish and ought, between desire and duty, is, Kant held, peculiar to and distinctive of man. Everything else in nature behaves as it does because, that being its nature, it can do no other. And that is true of us in so far as our natural behaviour, including all the things we desire, feel and think is

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concerned. But, as we have just seen, we can go against these wantings, feelings and thinkings, for in addition to what we want to do there is also what we know we ought to do. Now our wants, it is agreed, are determined. Therefore, in respect of what we feel we ought to do as opposed to what we want to do, we are not determined but free. Indeed it makes nonsense to say that we ought to do so and so, unless we are free to do it. Hence "ought" in Kant's famous phrase, implies "can" or, more technically, the consciousness of moral obligation implies freedom. The meaning of the phrase is that however difficult it may be for us to do our duty it is always possible for us to do it. That is why one can blame human beings when one cannot blame animals. It is as foolish to blame a tiger for tearing his prey as it is to blame a stone for rolling down hill, and we can all see that it is; but you can always blame a person for not doing what he knows to be right, and since all the other parts of our nature are, as we have seen, determined by the law of cause and effect which governs everything else in the world of nature and of living things, Kant held that we belong, in respect of what he called our consciousness of moral obligation, to a different, that is to say, to a non-natural, order of reality.

Kant drew attention to one more point. Consider any action that you like to take, anything that you feel called upon or want or are bidden to do; it is, he pointed out, conditioned by an "if." Take that road, we say, *if* you want to get to the village. Get up early *if* you want to catch the train. Work hard *if* you want to pass the examination. Be punctual at the office *if* you want to get promotion—and so on.

In other words, all actions which spring from the promptings of desire are what Kant called "hypo-

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thetical "; they only make sense *if* you want something which the action is designed to achieve. But the command to do what is right does not spring from anything that we may happen to want. When we recognise that something is our duty, we realise that the obligation to do it is not dependent on anything. Moreover, however hard or disagreeable the command to do our duty may be, we also, Kant maintained, realise that we ought to obey this command even if the Heavens fall. What is more, we always *can* obey it. Now all this holds good, even if we never do in fact obey the command to do what we know to be right, and always fail in our duty. Hence, he calls the moral imperative, that is to say, the command to do what we ought to do, "categorical," to distinguish it from all our other motives to action which, being dependent upon something else, are described as being "hypothetical."

### CRITICISM OF KANT'S VIEW

I have described this view at some length because it is, as it were, at the other pole of ethical theory from that of Socrates. Socrates laid stress upon the fact that virtue is a kind of knowledge; the good man is, as we have seen, for him, one who knows something, knows what is right and good, and little attention is given to the question of how he is to do what he knows to be right. Kant lays stress upon the freedom and the power of the will. We always, he points out, are free to will to do that which we ought to do, however strong the temptation may be to do otherwise; therefore, we are always free to do what we ought to do. But Kant in his turn makes very little provision for the fact that we often don't know what we ought to do. He seems to think that it is enough to point to the fact of moral obligation, that is, to the fact that we always know that we

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ought to do our duty even if the Heavens fall, as if what he calls the moral will never failed to point out our duty to us, as if in fact we were never in doubt as to what it enjoined.

Certain indications he does give. One is the famous universalisation maxim. We ought, he says, so to act that we can will the universalisation of our action, will, that is to say, that everybody should act likewise without contradiction.

### THAT WRONG ACTION CANNOT BE UNIVERSALISED

Now this is an important point. One of the outstanding characteristics of wrong actions is that everybody cannot do them, or, rather, that if they do do them, they lose their point. Take lying for example. The object of lying is to be believed. If nobody believed you when you lied, there would be no point in telling the lie. Now, if everybody lied all the time, nobody would believe anybody else, and there would be no point, therefore, in lying. Or take dishonesty. The object of the cheat is to deceive somebody. Now if everybody cheated all the time, nobody would trust anybody and cheating would lose its point. Or take stealing. If everybody stole all the time nobody would be doing any work, that is to say accumulating things to steal, and there would be nothing to steal. Hence, lying, dishonesty and stealing cannot, as Kant would say, be universalised without contradiction. This means that wrong action only pays some people sometimes because most people act rightly for most of the time, so that we reach the surprising conclusion that every time you tell the truth you make it slightly more worth while for somebody else to lie, by raising the general standard of trust-worthiness and belief in the community.

The fact that wrong action cannot be universalised

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means that every time I act wrongly I am making an exception in my own favour. Hence Kant's "universalisation maxim," as it is called, is a valuable guide to right conduct. Yet it does not take us very far, and in so far as it is true, it is something which we knew all the time; for Christianity has always taught that we ought to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. Moreover the maxim must be qualified by obvious exceptions. For example, it may well be the case, as most religions have maintained, that there is such a thing as a religious vocation, that is to say a special calling of a man to serve God. It may also be the case, as Catholics for instance insist, that this vocation cannot be adequately fulfilled by somebody who is immersed in ordinary family life; the man called to serve God should, in other words, remain unmarried. Now it may be—it probably is—a good thing that in every community there should be a certain number both of men and women who are celibate. Yet it is obvious that celibacy cannot be universalised, since if everybody were celibate the population would not be renewed, and there would soon be nobody left to be celibate.

More helpful, perhaps, is Kant's injunction that we should treat people as "ends" and never merely as "means." The intention here is to lay it down that it is always wrong to regard people merely as tools or conveniences for the furtherance of our purposes, wrong not to treat them as fellow beings having rights and purposes of their own. Obvious examples are the slave owner who treated his slaves merely as so much raw material to be worked to death in the cotton plantations, or the early nineteenth century mill and mine owners who sweated and underpaid their workmen whom they regarded, not as fellow



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human beings, but merely as profit-makers for themselves. The modern totalitarian State which regards its citizens as so much cannon fodder or machine labour without purposes or rights of their own, with no right to read what they please, write what they please or openly to speak their thoughts, liable to be arrested at will and kept in prison indefinitely without trial, is also treating human beings merely as means, means, that is to say, to its power.

In the sphere of individual conduct, lust without love is another example in point, since it entails regarding another person merely as a means to the satisfaction of one's own desires and not as the possessor of a personality of his or her own to be loved or at least respected for himself or herself. In general, the sin involved in what we call unscrupulousness—and we can, I think, see at once that it is indeed a sin—can be directly deduced from Kant's "means and ends" maxim. It means precisely treating people not as ends in themselves but as conveniences to be made use of, mere means to the fulfilment of our purposes.

Kant based his account of morality or, more precisely, he derived the obligation to do our duty from the fact that in respect of one part of ourselves, the moral part, we are, as I have already pointed out, members, on his view, of another order of reality. This order he called the "real order," and our knowledge that we ought to do our duty at all costs and our freedom to do it spring from the fact that, although we do indeed belong to the familiar world of living creatures and inanimate things moving about in space and time, the world in which our bodies move and which science studies, we do not belong to it exclusively.

But Christianity once again had anticipated this

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doctrine, laying it down that every individual is an immortal soul made in the image of his creator and entitled, therefore, to be treated with respect.

Apart from these two very general rules, the universalisation rule and the injunction to treat people as ends and not merely as means, Kant's theory gives very little guidance on the all-important question of how are we to know what it is right for us to do.

### THE DIFFICULTY OF DETERMINING OUR DUTY

Yet in practice it is precisely this that is so difficult to find out. A man may honestly want to "act," as he says, "for the best," and simply not know what "for the best" is. The classical example of this is given in the most famous of all Plato's Dialogues, the *Republic*, in which the nature of justice is discussed. One of the speakers in the Dialogue defines justice as repaying your debts, debts whether of money or of service. Socrates then asks: "But suppose a man lends you his sword and then goes mad. Ought you to return it to him?" Most people would say "No." Yet if that is the right answer, what becomes of Kant's universalisation maxim, since the repayment of what is due or owing is certainly something that ought to be done and it can be universally done without contradiction? Though the answer to the question, what ought I to do, is fairly clear in this case, there are other less extreme cases in which it is highly doubtful. Do I return a bottle of whisky which has been lent to me by a man who I know will get drunk on it and probably beat his wife? Or if he lends me a sum of money, do I return it to him knowing, as I do, that he will probably squander it on drink when his children have not enough to eat, or do I give it direct to his wife?

When I was at school the question used to come up in this sort of form:—"The ship is going down. There is only one place in the boat" or "there is only time to rescue one person. Do you save your mother or your wife?" Or, alternatively, "Do you save the baby or the picture of priceless worth by the world's greatest painter?"—it being pointed out by the advocates of picture saving that babies are easy to replace but that pictures by great masters are not. Good arguments can be adduced for either side. One ought, it is clear, to save both, but one can only save one. Many great tragedies deal with this theme of the conflict of loyalties, as it arises in the mind of the good man who really wants to do what is right. For as Aristotle points out, in a book, *The Poetics*, which deals with the principles governing the production of great works of art, the tragic situation is not that of the bad man who wants to do wrong or of the weak man who wants to do right but yields to the temptation to do what is wrong, but is that of the good man, the man of strong will and character, who wants to do the right thing but is pulled different ways by conflicting loyalties. For him, there are two right things both of which he ought to do, and yet he can only do one. Hamlet, for example, as I have pointed out above, wants to do what is right. He wants, that is to say, to avenge his father's murder. But is it right to kill the King, his uncle, especially when married to his mother? He doesn't know, and in speeches of enormous length he gives expression to his doubts. In the tragedy of the great Greek playwright, Sophocles, called *The Antigone*, the heroine is again torn between two duties. The body of her favourite brother lies unburied before the city wall; but the King has given express orders that it shall not be buried. She

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feels that it is her duty to obey the King; she also feels that it is her duty to bury her brother.

Or think of the moral conflict to which many heroines of drama, history and literature have been exposed when by accepting the invitation to become the mistress of a rich man they would obtain money to buy food for starving brothers and sisters at home. One ought to feed one's family; one cannot bear to see small children suffer; yet also one ought to preserve one's chastity and not to surrender one's body without love.

These are only a few examples of what I have called the first of the true problems of conduct, the problem of finding out what it is that we ought to do; of knowing, as Socrates puts it, what is "the good." We have already considered examples of the second problem, the problem of resisting temptations addressed to our love of ease or our lack of courage, or of gainsaying desires which bid us not to do what we know we ought to do.

As to the general problem of human conduct, it may well be the case that no purely philosophical theory *can* cover all the ground.

But, it may be asked, have no *positive* rules of good conduct been laid down by the philosophers? Have they nothing to say on the question of what things it is *right* for us to pursue? On both questions they have a great deal to say.

In the next chapter we will consider one doctrine on the subject of what it is right to pursue, the doctrine, namely, that affirms that one thing and one thing only is truly valuable, and that is pleasure. In the following chapter we will consider the practical rules for the pursuit of good laid down in Aristotle's

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Doctrine of the Mean. We will finally consider what Plato's philosophy has to say on the subject of those things which are really worth pursuing in and for themselves.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLEASURE

ONE OF the most celebrated doctrines in philosophy is that pleasure or happiness is the only thing that is really valuable, the two words "pleasure" and "happiness" being used to mean the same thing. If we were asked to try and say what that "thing" is we cannot, it is obvious, answer, for pleasure is not like anything else in terms of which it could be described. But everybody knows what pleasure is like so that it needs no description. Moreover, we all want pleasure; indeed, according to this doctrine, pleasure is the *only* thing we want.

There are broadly two forms of the doctrine. The first is that we are so constituted that we can only desire pleasure, that is to say, our own personal pleasure; the other, that pleasure is the only thing that is really good or really valuable, so that although we *can* desire things other than pleasure and think them to be good, in so desiring and thinking we are making a mistake, since, as pleasure is the only thing that is really valuable and really good, pleasure is the only thing that we *ought* to desire. Most of those who hold this latter form of the doctrine have also held that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, and not the happiness merely of ourselves, is what we ought to aim at.

The first form of the view that pleasure is the

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one thing that is really good and valuable is called Psychological Hedonism, from the Greek word *Hedone* which means pleasure. The second form is called Ethical Hedonism. I will say something about each of them in turn.

### 1. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEDONISM

This doctrine turns up continuously in the history of philosophy, from the ancient Greeks onwards. In the early nineteenth century it received its most distinctive statement from the English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham. Briefly his view was as follows:—

If you want to know what a right action is, you can find out only by considering its consequences. That which is right in any given case is that which, of all the actions which it was open to a person to do, has the best consequences. The best consequences are those which involve the greatest amount of pleasure for the person doing the action. This view *doesn't require* the further view that man *can* only desire his own greatest pleasure; but Bentham did, in fact, hold this further view also. Take, he said in effect, any situation you please and consider the motive of the man who is considering how he ought to act; you will find that what determines his action in the long run is what he thinks will bring him most pleasure. He may, of course, and often does, make a mistake in his calculation as to what *will* bring him pleasure. But that is not the point. The point is that he always does do that which, if he were to stop to think about it all, would in his opinion, whether it be right or wrong, give him most pleasure.

Here, for example, are two children each of whom at Christmas time is in receipt of a gift of money. The little boy spends his money on buying chocolates for himself, over-eats and is promptly sick.

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"Greedy little beast," say his elders, "Serve him right, he is utterly selfish. He only thinks of his own pleasure." The little girl, however, shows greater complexity of character. *She* spends her money on buying presents for her elders, with the result that everybody says "What a nice, unselfish little girl. She thinks of others' pleasure before her own." But does she? For consider, she may be animated by purely prudential motives. If she gives presents to her elder relatives they are almost certain to repay in kind; they are richer than she is, so that she will gain in the long run. Or, alternatively, being given to the complacent priggishness which characterises so many little girls, her desire may be to bask in the sunshine of others' esteem and approval. She gets her greatest pleasure from being praised and patted on the head by her elder relatives and by the thought of the striking contrast, a contrast inestimably to her own advantage, that she presents to her greedy little pig of a brother.

Or, alternatively, you can say, if you like, that she is *really* unselfish. What is an unselfish person? One who prefers other people's happiness to his own: or, more precisely, one who gets his own greatest pleasure from promoting the happiness of others. Whichever explanation of the little girl's motives you like to take, her action still falls within the bounds of the hedonist's formula. She is still acting with a view to obtaining her own greatest pleasure; but she obtains it by different methods from those adopted by the little boy.

Here, again, is a Christian martyr going to the stake for his opinions not, you would have thought at first sight, an action which would be normally performed by one who was deliberately seeking his own pleasure. But think again. You may say



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that the martyr has a strong histrionic sense. He likes to play to the gallery; he likes to be in the centre of the stage; he likes the spotlight of publicity. When the spotlight gets, as it does in this case, uncomfortably warm, he finds out his mistake but by then it is too late to draw back. Or, alternatively, the martyr is by definition a man of immense strength of will and determination. If you think he is making a fool of himself, you may call him stubborn. Now, to a stubborn man, there is no greater pain than yielding his will to that of others. Therefore in deciding to go to the stake rather than to yield, he is avoiding his own greatest pain, which is, in effect, the same as saying that he is consulting his own greatest pleasure.

Or alternatively, you can say that most martyrs have been upborne by strong religious conviction. They have felt convinced of the truth of their own religion or brand of religion, and believed that if they betrayed it, they would be severely punished hereafter—would, in fact, so most of them have thought, go to Hell. If, on the other hand, they stood fast, they would be rewarded by eternal happiness in Heaven. The choice, then, for them was between ten minutes' or a quarter of an hour's agony in an earthly fire or an eternity of agony in an infernal one. Anybody in his senses, given these convictions, would choose the former, promoting thereby his own greatest happiness or—which is the same thing—avoiding his own greatest pain.

On these lines we can explain away almost any apparent virtue. Take, for example, the virtue of selfless self-sacrifice. Here is a mother who sacrifices herself for her child, or a man who places himself in a position of danger to shield his girl. Of each of them we should say, "She" (or he) "is acting

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unselfishly." Each, that is to say, *appears* to be preferring somebody else's safety or comfort to her or his own. But look more closely. By the mother her child, by the young man his girl is loved. It is natural to care about the happiness of a loved person and it is possible that you might care about it so much that the mere sight of the loved one's suffering would be almost intolerably painful; so much so, that the amount of pain involved in thinking of or seeing a loved one suffering would be greater than that of suffering directly in one's own person. Thus, in sacrificing themselves for others the mother and the young man are really promoting their own greatest happiness. For they are, are they not, unselfish and what, as I asked in the case of the little girl, is the definition of an unselfish person if it isn't one who prefers another's happiness to his own? Which is only a disguised way of saying that the unselfish person gets his own greatest happiness from promoting the happiness of others. Or, if we prefer another explanation, we can describe the action of, at any rate, the mother as proceeding from instinct. Now everybody knows that to "go against" your instincts involves pain, the pain of frustration and deprivation.

These are examples of the way in which the doctrine that the motive of every action is to get pleasure for the doer of the action can be applied in cases which seem at first sight to contradict it.

If the account given is correct, then whatever else we may *seem* to desire, whether it be power or wealth or fame or possessions, we shall always be found to desire it in the last resort for the sake of the pleasure we expect it to bring us, and whatever may be the motive that *seems* to inspire our actions, it will, in fact, be the motive of obtaining pleasure

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for ourselves. Thus if we take a commonplace action like that of a half-back passing to a forward in a game of soccer, we can say that he does it because he thinks—or would think, if he stopped to think about it at all—that in that situation it is the best thing to do. And what does “best” mean? The answer is, most likely to help his side and so to increase its chances of victory and to bring glory to himself as one who has helped to promote that victory. Now he wants his side to win; he also wants glory for himself. Therefore, the achievement of these things will make him happy. Therefore, in doing what he does do he is trying to further what he takes to be his own greatest happiness.

To sum up, we always do what we *want* to do most. If it wasn't what we wanted to do most—if, that is to say, we wanted to do something else more—we wouldn't do it.

### 2. ETHICAL HEDONISM

This is the doctrine that although we can in fact desire other things besides our own pleasure, we *ought* only to desire pleasure, since pleasure is the only thing that is really good. If this is true, the more pleasure, the better; hence, if by acting in a certain way I can give  $X$  amount of pleasure to a number of people and  $Y$  amount to myself, and if by acting in another way  $A$  amount of pleasure to a number of people and  $B$  amount to myself and if, though  $Y$  is greater than  $B$ , the whole  $A+B$  is greater than the whole  $X+Y$ , then I *ought* to prefer the second action to the first, since the amount of total good, namely pleasure, represented by  $A+B$  is greater than the amount represented by  $X+Y$ ; what is more, I ought to prefer it even if, in so doing, I obtain less pleasure for myself.

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This view, then, introduces the concept of duty, that is to say of what I *ought* to do. Now if Psychological Hedonism is true, the conception of duty is nonsensical, for the conception of duty means that there are some things that one ought to do and others that one ought not; some things that it is right to desire, others wrong. But if you *can* only desire your own greatest pleasure and *can* only act in accordance with your desire, it is meaningless to say that you ought to desire something else or to act in some other way. This conclusion was accepted by the Psychological Hedonist, Jeremy Bentham:—" If," he said, " the word ' ought ' means anything at all, then it ' ought ' to be excluded from the dictionary."

But on this second view, that is the view of the ethical hedonists, the word " duty " does mean something, since there are some things that we ought to do and other things that we ought not to do. In point of fact those who propounded this second view, notably John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century, held that, we ought so to act as to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. This brings us to his definition of a " right action." A right action, he held, is one that, of all those that it is open to the agent to do, will have the best possible consequences, that is to say will produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Now we ought to do right actions. Mill meant his injunction to apply to governments as much as to individuals. Thus both Bentham and Mill held that the test of good government was the happiness of the people governed. What, they asked, should be the purpose of legislation? and answered that it should be to increase the happiness of the greatest number of people.

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This sounds well enough, and if Governments had regularly kept this injunction in mind as a guide to their actions, the world would be a much happier place than it is.

### CRITICISM OF ETHICAL HEDONISM

There is, however, one great difficulty about Ethical Hedonism which it is worth while to point out here before we turn to consider the more interesting doctrine of Psychological Hedonism. The difficulty lies in the statement that though we *can* desire other things besides pleasure, we ought only to desire pleasure, since pleasure is the only thing that is really good. Why is it the *only* good? Surely there are many other things that people think to be good besides pleasure. There is beauty, for example. Go for a walk in a wood on a lovely spring morning. You are, or you may be, filled with happiness. Agreed. But why are you? Because, you may say, everything—the birds, the trees, the flowers, the sunlight and shadow—is so beautiful; not *happy* but *beautiful*, and because we value beauty we feel happy. But the condition of our feeling happy is that we should value and rejoice in beauty for its own sake. In other words, we value and rejoice in something other than pleasure, namely, in this case, beauty, and it is this something or other which makes us feel happy.

Similarly, people are filled with happiness when they have brought an arduous train of difficult research in science to a successful conclusion, or made some important discovery or solved a problem or a mystery. This is the happiness that attends the discovery of truth. But unless we value a truth for its own sake, we should not feel happy when we had discovered it. It seems, then, that we value some things besides happiness. Some other things,

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then, are what philosophers call "goods," notably, beauty and truth—and it is only because we do, indeed, see these things to be good and value them in and for themselves that we enjoy them, that is to say, get happiness from pursuing or possessing them.

### QUALITIES OF PLEASURE

And that this is, indeed, the case is shown by the distinction which John Stuart Mill introduced between *qualities* of pleasure. Bentham, who consistently maintained that pleasure is the only thing we really want, that is to say, the only thing of real value, concluded quite rightly that the more of it we have, the better. Nor, he thought, did it make any difference what *kind* of pleasure it was that we enjoyed. Hence a famous phrase of his to the effect that "All other things being equal, push-pin," which was a game like skittles played in the alleys of nineteenth century pubs, "is as good as poetry." Now if pleasure is, as the philosophers put it, the only standard of value, this conclusion is quite logical. But to Mill it seemed obvious, as indeed it is, that some pleasures were better or, as he put it, of *higher quality* than others, notably the pleasures of the intellect and the spirit, and we ought, he thought, to prefer a smaller quantity of high quality pleasure to a larger quantity of low quality pleasure. In his own words: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."

But this surely won't do. For what does "higher quality pleasure" mean? Not, it is obvious, more pleasure of *the same kind*. What can it mean, then, but pleasure plus something other than pleasure, in virtue of which the pleasure which we are feeling is deemed to be "high" or "higher." This something or other—it may be a knowledge of truth, an

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appreciation of beauty or the will to do what is right or the approval of somebody's good character—must, it is obvious, be something which is regarded as being valuable in itself since, if it weren't, there would be no ground for preferring a smaller quantity of high quality pleasure to the larger quantity of low quality pleasure. But this conclusion implies that there are some things of value, such as truth or beauty or goodness, as well as pleasure, and the notion that pleasure is the only thing of value has to be given up.

Moreover, to say that it is my duty to try to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, implies, does it not, that I can act from some motive other than pleasure, from the motive, that is to say, of doing my duty. But why should I desire to do my duty, if it be true, as Ethical Hedonism maintains, that the only thing that I *ought* to desire is pleasure, since pleasure is the only thing that is good?

Bentham, who was excessively optimistic about human nature, seemed to think that people would always obtain the greatest amount of pleasure for themselves by trying to promote the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people. But there seems to be no reason to think that this is the case. On the contrary, it is clear that cases can arise in which I can "go out" wholeheartedly for my own pleasure or I can "go out" for other people's. Thus, if four of us are starving and we are presented with a small cake to be divided among the four, my greatest pleasure, especially if I happen to be selfish, will be obtained by eating the lot if I get the chance. But there is, I think, no doubt that I should promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people by dividing the cake into four equal slices. Hence, if I do in fact divide it

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which, after all, is what everybody would say I ought to do, it is clear that what I am motivated by is not pleasure but something that we may call justice. I *will*, in fact, to do the just thing, even if it militates against my own greatest pleasure. These, then, are some of the reasons which render it unlikely that Ethical Hedonism, according to which pleasure is the only thing which in the end is good, that is to say, good in and for itself, is true.

### CRITICISM OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HEDONISM

Let us return to Psychological Hedonism, that is, the view that we are so constituted that we *can* only desire our own pleasure. Is there any good reason to think it is true? I don't think that there is. And yet at first hearing it can be made to sound very attractive. It is my job to teach philosophy and I have noticed again and again how people coming into contact with philosophical ideas for the first time "fall for" Psychological Hedonism. (The same, by the way, is true of the view that everything that we know is mental in the sense of being in our own minds, which is described in Chapter VII.) There is, I think, an element of rationalisation here, that is to say, the kind of reasoning that lies behind a smoker's arguments when he tries to prove that tobacco ash is good for the carpet—it would be convenient to him if it were. For Psychological Hedonism affords a first-rate justification for selfish and immoral conduct. If we *can* only do what we want to do most, nobody can blame us for what we do, in fact, do. After all, we are not responsible for what we want. It *may* be true that a man *can* do this or do that according as his will decides; but nobody can say, I will *like* doing this or *like* doing that, for our likes and dislikes are beyond our control. It follows that if we are so constituted that we *can* only act



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in accordance with our strongest liking at the moment we can't be held responsible for our actions. We may as well, then, do what we like and let our desires and passions "rip" without hindrance or scruple. Now this, as all will agree, is a very convenient doctrine. Nevertheless, there are strong objections to it. I will mention three.

1. The first is that it puts the cart before the horse. There are a great many things that we do because, as we say, "we want to do them"—playing football or chess, going to a concert or taking a girl to the cinema. If we were asked *why* we wanted to do them, I doubt whether we could improve on the answer that "we just do." It is, no doubt, true that we hope to get pleasure from doing them, and we may in fact get it, but to say that we did them—played football for example—in order to get the pleasure, would be simply not true as an account of our psychological experience. What is more, it is only because we want to do, and do in fact do, things for their own sakes that we get pleasure from doing them. The truth of the matter is that it is because I want to play football that I get pleasure from playing it. The wrong way to put this is to say that I play it in order to get the pleasure. Generalising this, we may say that it is only in so far as I want things in and for themselves, that is to say, want things other than pleasure, that I obtain pleasure from getting them and doing them. What, then, is meant by saying that Psychological Hedonism puts the cart before the horse is that it puts first the pleasure which actually comes second—or, rather, puts in front the pleasure which actually comes behind—by assuming that we do for the sake of pleasure the things that we really do for their own sakes, and then, precisely because we did want

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to do them for their own sakes, get pleasure from doing them.

2. A somewhat similar criticism was made by a celebrated eighteenth century English philosopher, Bishop Butler. His view was that the constitution of human nature was rather like the works of a watch, in that it consisted of a number of different parts or elements, the virtue or excellence of which lies, as in the case of the watch, not in themselves but in their being in a right relationship to one other. There are no virtues in a spring or a wheel; the virtue of a watch lies in the fact that the spring makes the wheel go round. At the lowest end of the scale, constituting, as it were, what we might call the raw material of human nature, are the appetites or passions. Butler thought of the appetites and passions as though they were a number of separate cravings, each of which demanded the kind of satisfaction proper to itself. Thus, the appetite of hunger craves for food, and is satisfied by food; the passion of revenge craves for the injury of another person and is satisfied by that injury; the emotion or passion of anger, for speaking one's mind, breaking the furniture or bashing somebody in the face. When an appetite or passion is satisfied, we experience pleasure, the pleasure, namely, of the satisfaction of appetite, but it is, he maintained, wrong as a matter of psychological fact to say that the pleasure is what we are aiming at, when we take steps to satisfy the appetite. He supported this contention by pointing out that the satisfaction of a particular appetite, desire, impulse or passion, though it might and, indeed, would bring momentary pleasure, might well be prejudicial to the happiness of the whole personality. Thus, the craving to drink strong liquor, though it brings tem-

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porary pleasure to the drinker, militates, if over-indulged in, against his greatest pleasure on the whole, by making him sick or giving him a headache or leading him to beat his wife or getting him into bad odour with his employer.

Similarly, as I pointed out in the last chapter, the impulse to boast, though it brings pleasure at the time, probably diminishes our pleasure on the whole, since it causes people to think ill of us.

Now Butler held that in addition to the array of impulses, desires and passions, each of which seeks only for its own satisfaction, our natures include two principles which he called respectively "cool self-love" which aims at the maximum pleasure of the self as a whole and "benevolence" which aims at producing pleasure in other people, which God intended to govern the passions and which in a properly regulated human nature would govern them. The point of his watch analogy is that just as in a properly regulated watch the various parts, the springs, the wheels, the cogs, the balance and so on, stand in a particular relation to one another which is the right relation, so in a properly regulated person there is a right relation for the various parts of his nature; this relationship required that the passions, appetites and impulses should be in subjection to the principles of cool self-love and benevolence.

Now each of the appetites, desires and impulses aims, as we have seen, at the satisfaction proper to itself. When the appetite achieves the satisfaction proper to itself, pleasure is felt, but it may not be felt by the whole personality, or felt for long or felt in the long run. The pleasures of anger, for example, are almost always followed by remorse, and even when you are experiencing it, a part of you may be holding back and looking on and saying to you,

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just as, perhaps, you are bashing the other man in the face, "you know you will suffer for this afterwards." So, if the appetites were allowed to have their way with us as and when they pleased, our lives would contain little pleasure and might easily be brought to shipwreck. It is here that the two principles of cool self-love and benevolence step in to regulate and check the passions. Thus cool self-love makes it its business to ensure that the indulgence of the appetites and passions is not allowed to militate against the greatest pleasure of the whole personality, while benevolence keeps, as it were, an eye on the consequences to others of their satisfaction.

Our concern here is with cool self-love. Its function is well described in a famous metaphor of Plato. He asks us to think of two chariots drawn by unruly horses. The first chariot is driven by a nervous charioteer or by no charioteer at all. Consequently each of the horses takes the bit between its teeth and, as first one and then the other exerts the stronger pull, the chariot is dragged about all over the track; it pursues a zig-zag course first here, then there, and is incapable of arriving at any desired destination; it may even overturn. The second chariot is driven by a strong charioteer who allows to each horse only so much of its own way as is compatible with each of the others having its way. The horses, then, are driven in harmony, the chariot maintains a straight course and reaches its desired destination. Cool self-love in the analogy is the strong charioteer; the horses are the appetites and passions.

Now action in accordance with cool self-love is quite clearly hedonistic action, since it is designed to obtain the greatest pleasure for the self by indulging, checking and dove-tailing the various passions

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so that this end is achieved. But, Butler points out, many of our actions, especially, if our natures are ill-regulated, are dictated not by cool self-love but by the separate appetites and passions, and are very far from promoting the greatest pleasure of the self as a whole. Others of our actions are motivated by benevolence which, though it aims at pleasure, does not necessarily aim at *our* pleasure, and others again by a faculty which he calls conscience, which in a properly regulated nature he thinks of as being set over both cool self-love and benevolence to regulate them as they regulate the passions. The following example will illustrate the point. If I am shipwrecked on a desert island and together with the rest of the starving crew make a meal off the cabin boy, we are presumably motivated by the appetite of hunger, and though we get a certain amount of momentary satisfaction from appeasing our craving, it would be wrong to say that pleasure was the motive of our action. The motive of our action is to satisfy hunger. If after a six-course dinner during which my appetite has been completely satisfied, I am offered a delicious savoury which I proceed to eat although I am no longer hungry in order to obtain the pleasure of the agreeable sensations which it will evoke, I am acting from cool self-love, acting, that is to say, with the deliberate purpose of obtaining pleasure for the self. If I am starving and am presented with the six-course dinner plus the savoury, I shall presumably enjoy first the pleasures of satisfied desire, and then the pleasure of cool self-love. My motives in eating will be mixed, but as the meal proceeds and hunger is progressively satisfied, I shall be acting less and less with a view to the satisfaction of the appetite and more and more with a view to obtaining pleasure.

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The conclusion of this argument, according to which I sometimes but certainly don't always act from the motives and in the way which Psychological Hedonism asserts, seems to me convincing.

### 3. THE DELIBERATE SEARCH FOR PLEASURE

I propose to mention one other consideration, although it belongs less to the category or argument than to that of wisdom; for it is part of the general stock of human wisdom which men have slowly accumulated through the ages. Pleasure, wise men tell us, is something that should not normally be pursued directly; if it is, it is apt to elude the pursuer. For pleasure, it seems, is not something which is, as it were, directly and deliberately produced; it is in the nature rather of a by-product like coke, or the bright colours that you will see on an oil film when the sunlight strikes it. Aristotle brings out this characteristic of pleasure very clearly. Let us, he says, suppose an organism which is functioning perfectly in an appropriate environment in respect of work which is just right for it—one thinks, let us say, of a healthy, muscular lumberman, cutting down trees of just the right size for hauling about, for just the right length of time, with axe and saw both of which are in perfect condition; then, said, Aristotle, there will be a something added to the other experiences of the organism, something extra thrown in, as it were, to grace the activity. That something is pleasure. He compares it to the bloom on the cheek of a young man in perfect health; the bloom is not part of the health but it is a touch of added perfection which serves as a sign that all is well; the pleasure, as it were, completes the activity. What, I think, is meant by these metaphors and similes—they are, of course, no more—is that pleasure is not a thing in itself and should not,

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therefore, be pursued as if it were, but is in the nature of a grace or adornment that comes to clothe certain states of mind. What states? Taking Aristotle's hint, we shall look to the experiences of a person engaged upon a piece of work, the harder the better, provided that it lies well within his compass, calls out all his energies, challenges his skill and gives scope to his talents. Work hard for an examination, dig vigorously in the garden, play a hard-fought game of football, climb a difficult cliff-face, spend all day walking across the moors or fells, then, when the evening comes and you are sitting, perhaps, outside your tent by the camp fire that you have made, you will realise, on looking back, that you have been happy. I am putting all this in terms of the experiences of people who are not yet fully grown up, but experience shows that all through life those who are wrapped up in their work or devoted to a creed or cause are the world's happy people. All this is summed up very well in a famous phrase of Bernard Shaw to the effect that the only way to avoid being miserable is not to have enough leisure to wonder whether you are happy or not.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

I PROPOSE in this chapter to examine one particular theory of how we ought to act, or, perhaps I should say, how we should be *well-advised* to act, which the Greeks have bequeathed to us as a practical guide to good conduct. The theory is at bottom no more than common sense; but it is inspired common sense. It is known as the doctrine of "The Mean" and is developed in Aristotle's Ethics.

#### ARISTOTLE ON THE TRAINING OF CHARACTER

Aristotle is inclined to favour the view that virtue—or at any rate such virtue as most of us can ever hope to acquire—is something that can be taught. He thinks of the passions and desires and emotions of boys and girls as so much raw material to be moulded by the legislators who make the laws of the State and still more by the masters who make the rules of the school, into whatever shape or shapes they desire. He thought further that as boys and girls grew to manhood and womanhood they would acquire a *habit* of acting in accordance with the rules which they had been taught. If the rules were good rules and prescribed right and virtuous conduct, then people would act rightly and virtuously almost, as it were, automatically without having to think about it, just as they would clean their teeth automatically without having to think about it. Now there is, I think, not much doubt that you can in fact mould people's characters in



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this way, not so much by changing the stuff of which people are made, as by altering the way in which and the purposes for which the stuff, the raw material, is used.

Think for a moment of the basic raw material of human nature as a continuously welling spring of water flowing into the stream of desires, impulses, wants and needs by which we are impelled to action. The question is, along what channels shall the stream run? What the good educator and trainer does is to dig channels along which the water shall flow to good ends and not to bad ones; or again, he seeks to ensure that it should not, as so often happens, dissipate itself by running to waste in a number of different directions, without ever accumulating a sufficient volume to flow with vehemence along any channel, that is, to enable effective action to be taken in pursuit of any objective.

Take an example from school life. Here, let us say, is a boy much given to fighting; then the same head of combative energy which now expresses itself in continual scraps and scuffles can be used to turn him into a first class front line scrum forward. Here is another who is a natural bully. There are two kinds of bullying, one of which proceeds from the love of exerting power, the other from the love of inflicting pain. We will suppose that the bully we are taking as our example belongs to the first class. The wise master will give him a responsible position by making him a monitor or prefect, so that he now exercises authorised power as a person responsible for what he does instead of wasting his energies by throwing his weight about all over the place. Presently the practice of exercising authority grows into a habit and the boy becomes a formed

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character, able to administer justice as a Colonial Civil Servant or to make himself obeyed as an officer.

These, then, are examples of ways in which the emotions and desires can be trained when treated as raw material. The wise educator digs appropriate channels for them to flow along when we are young, and so directs them that by the time he is an adult their owner is in possession of a good character. Hence, the trained man does what he ought to do without thinking about it, because he has been given the habit of acting rightly by his education. Just as, when you take a cold bath every morning in the winter, you do not have to struggle afresh each morning against the natural tendency of your warm, soft body to shrink from this cold repulsive fluid, because you have formed the habit of cold baths, so difficult and arduous actions which a boy originally has to be taught or even compelled to do, like telling the truth, sharing equally with others, not boasting, not letting one's side down, and so on presently become habitual and are performed without moral struggle. Such is Aristotle's teaching on the subject of the training of the desires and emotions. But to what end should they be trained? What, in fact, *are* the right channels, for, as Aristotle says, unless we know the goal at which we should aim both in respect of our own conduct and in respect of the training of others, we shall be like archers who let off their arrows at random without knowing where the target is or, indeed, whether there is a target at all. The answer to this question brings me to the doctrine of the Mean.

### STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

Aristotle holds that right conduct of whatever kind is in the nature of a mean or middle point be-

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tween two extremes. The doctrine has a physical basis. Both Plato and Aristotle thought of bodily health as a sort of balancing of the body between pairs of principles or elements which are in constant conflict within the body. When the body is in perfect health these contrary principles are balanced; any course of conduct which disturbs the balance harms the body and destroys health. Thus, too much exercise or too little, too much food or too little, too much heat or too much cold—all these upset that balance between the principles which constitute health.

The same, he held, is true of what he called "the soul"; this, too, if it is to be healthy must be in a condition of balance between extremes, that is to say, the extreme of too much and the extreme of too little. Hence virtue, which is a state of the soul, is a mean condition of harmonious balance between opposites. Courage, for example, which is a virtue, is a mean condition between the rashness which has no proper appreciation of risks and the cowardice which fears everything. Generosity, which is a virtue, is a mean condition between prodigality, the giving away of anything to anybody without consideration of merit or desert, and the meanness which won't give away anything. Tactful consideration for others is a virtue which stands midway between a rude insensitiveness to other people's feelings which insists on drawing attention to any fact, however embarrassing or disagreeable and rubbing people's noses in it, and the hypocrisy which, in the effort to please, pretends that things are other than they are. Temperance is a mean between the self-indulgence which is unable to resist any temptation which may offer itself to the senses and the asceticism which is so afraid of the delights

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of the flesh that it dare not taste them at all, neither drinking nor smoking nor eating good things, afraid to bend for fear lest it break.

The case of smoking offers a good modern example of the wisdom which the doctrine of the Mean teaches. Let me put it in terms of my own experience. When I first started to smoke—omitting, of course, the first few cigarettes which made me sick—every cigarette was felt as a delight. In order to increase the number of these delights, I increased the number of cigarettes until a time came when I grew so dependent on them that I was miserable whenever I lacked a cigarette between my lips. In order to get rid of this misery, I smoked still more cigarettes hoping thus to allay the craving which I experienced when *not* smoking. Whereas originally each cigarette gave me positive pleasure, it now only served to get rid of my sense of craving and so brought me back to normal. Formerly it was a plus value; now it was the redressing of the minus value which was constituted by its absence. The consequence was that I was expending an ever-increasing quantity of time and money in order to obtain an ever-diminishing supply of enjoyment. I had, it was obvious, offended against the doctrine of the Mean which required me to find by experiment the precise number of cigarettes which gave me the maximum amount of pleasure without creating a disagreeable sense of lack when I was not smoking them. (It turned out in fact that this balance between too few and too many was never achieved in terms of cigarettes at all, but was ultimately established in the form of pipe smoking—four pipes a day, no more and no less.)

To resume, the training which Aristotle recommended aimed at inculcating the habit of mind which

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would enable people to know and recognise the right point at which to *stop* from the point of view of the good health both of the body and soul. And, incidentally, he added, this point, the point of maximum satisfaction of which our natures are capable, would always be found to be the point at which two contrary extremes were held in a kind of balanced tension. Now this point is far from always being the same in the case of all our many different feelings and desires. To take an analogy from medicine, a very little of some drugs may be just the right amount in some cases, while in the case of other drugs we may need a much larger quantity. Also the "Mean" point differs with different people. If, for example, I am of a hot-tempered disposition the mean point of anger for me, the point at which I feel righteously indignant at what may justly arouse my indignation, while not allowing my temper to run away with me over trivialities and matters of no importance, may be much nearer anger and much further from placid indifference than in the case of a poor spirited or even a calm natured chap who has to be violently insulted before he will fire up.

Let me give an illustration suggested by a well-known authority on Aristotle\* :—"On a given occasion there will be a temperature which is just right for my morning bath. If the bath is hotter than this, it will be too hot; if it is colder it will be too cold, but as this just right temperature varies with the condition of my body, it cannot be ascertained by simply using a thermometer. If I am in good general health I shall, however, know by the feel of the water when the temperature is right. So

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\* Professor Burnet.

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if I am in good moral health I shall know without appealing to a formal code of maxims, what is the right degree, for example, of indignation, to show in a given case, how it should be shown and towards whom.” So much for the statement of the doctrine.

### COMMENTS

The first thing that strikes one about it is that it is a doctrine for middle, even for old age rather than for youth. Its appeal is to a sort of calculating prudence. Never go so far, it says in effect, that you can't stop; also, it is probably wise to stop while you still want to go on; also, you ought to be perpetually on the look-out to see whether the right stopping place has been reached and on your guard to see that you haven't gone beyond it. It is true that on Aristotle's view this desirable state of mind should have become habitual; you don't, he would say, require to be thinking about your conduct all the time—at least you don't if you have been properly trained, because the knowledge of when to stop and the will-power to give effect to your knowledge, will have been so deeply implanted in you by your education that you can exercise the knowledge and call upon the will without having to think about the matter one way or the other.

Nevertheless, one can't help concluding that the effect of the doctrine must be to check our impulses, those which are good as well as those which are bad. Hence those people who are apt to act upon impulse without taking too much thought to consider whether what they are doing conforms to the accepted rules of right conduct would find themselves somewhat damped and discouraged, if they tried to follow Aristotle's formula.

The adoption of the doctrine further involves a willingness to dispense with all intense pleasures,

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for the experience of intense pleasure almost always involves a departure from the state of balance in the person who enjoys it. For example, the most intense pleasure in drinking is experienced by the man who is in a fever or who is being tortured by thirst, just as eating gives the greatest delight when we are nearly starving with hunger. In other words, the more violent pleasures are those which follow upon the more violent pains, the pain of fear, for example, or the pain of want.<sup>\*</sup> They imply, therefore, that the state of balance between the different principles upon which the health both of body and mind depends has been already disturbed. Now, when they are young, men and women, and especially men, want adventure. They want to cross deserts, voyage round the world, climb Mount Everest, go to the North Pole—or the moon. They want to feel the full stretch of their faculties in the face of danger, to call upon their last ounce of energy and effort to cope with a crisis. A certain amount of intense and thrilling excitement is felt by young people to be a necessary ingredient of life, and who shall say that they are wrong? Are they, then, to be deterred from adventure by the thought that in pursuit of it they may well have to undergo bodily ardours and endurances, to suffer the pain of bodily deprivations whose overcoming or making good will be attended by the most intense pleasure; that, in short, they will be departing from the doctrine of the Mean? I think not.

Hence young people, in so far as they take it seriously, are likely to find the doctrine unsatisfactory as a universal guide to conduct. Moreover, I doubt if many of us, especially when young, will

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<sup>\*</sup> See Chapter Five, pages 100, 101, for a development of this line of thought.

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be inclined to take it seriously. Young people aren't disposed to be always taking their moral temperatures and we should not think well of those who do.

But there is another and more serious objection. Almost everything that has been done in the world that has been worth doing, the causes that have been led, the revolutions that have been made, the religions that have been preached, the explorations that have been essayed, have proceeded from a kind of excess, an excess of faith, of fortitude or simply of the spirit of adventure. A strict adherence to the doctrine of the Mean would have stopped the adventurers, the pioneers, the visionaries and the saints at the outset.

Consider the case of the leader of an apparently lost cause, the Italian patriot Garibaldi, for example; or of a saint like Father Damien who gave up a brilliant business career to go and live among the lepers in the settlement of Molokai; or of the Christians who went to the stake rather than renounce their religious creeds; or of reformers like Clarkson and Wilberforce who laboured year after year against what must at the time have seemed impossible odds to free the slaves; or of the men who made the great Russian revolution, Lenin and Tolstoy, which has changed the face of one fifth of the globe. It is pretty obvious, is it not, that all of them were upborne and sustained by a great power of conviction which cool reason could neither explain nor justify; also that they must have sacrificed many of the small pleasures, subordinated most of the commonplace aims of the humdrum, easy-going life of everyday middle class people in the interests of one dominating purpose? I am not suggesting that everything that these men did was good; I am con-



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tent to point out that some of it, at least, was good, and that it is to the efforts of selfless enthusiasts of this type that most if not all the great moral and political advances of mankind have been due.

Similarly, in the sphere of art and science: many of the great artists and composers whose work is now universally acclaimed lived some parts of their lives in obscurity, poverty and neglect. Just because their work broke new ground, it seemed shocking to those who were brought into contact with it for the first time, discordant and inharmonious if the artist's inspiration found expression in music, ugly, grotesque and unlikelike if it realised itself in painting. The reception of the early work of Beethoven and Wagner and of the nineteenth century French painters known as the Impressionists—Manet, Monet, Sisley, Seurat and Cézanne—affords a good example of a truth which could be illustrated over and over again from the history of the arts. In science many of the great advances have been made by men whose early work was ridiculed or whose results were received with incredulity. Ehrlich and Pasteur who were pioneers in the germ theory of the origin of diseases are examples of men who persevered in the face of every conceivable discouragement.

Now the lives of all these men exhibited an almost complete disregard of the doctrine of the Mean. Excelling in faith or enthusiasm or in single-mindedness, emphatically they did not cleave to the middle way. Hence, though the doctrine may serve well enough in its application to common or garden men, especially when the first ardours and enthusiasms of youth are passed, it cannot be commended as a guide to conduct for those who would do great things in the world.

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### THE VIRTUES OF THE INTELLECT

One matter remains to be touched upon. I said at the beginning of this chapter that Aristotle believed that it was by the training of the emotions and desires that man's character was formed. If a man were properly trained and educated, then he would habitually tend to do the right thing when he had come to maturity without knowing why he did it. In other words, he would take its rightness on trust, believing what he had been taught in youth, when he was told that it was right without also being told why it was right.

Now there is, it is obvious, a stage beyond this. You can do what is right knowing not only *that* it is right because you have, as it were, learned its rightness by heart, but also because you know *why* it is right; because, in other words, you know what rightness and goodness are. The distinction is like that between the boy who knows that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal and can even repeat the proof, but doesn't in the least know why they are equal or understand the proof which he has learned by heart and the boy who not only knows the proof but knows also *why* it is a proof. Those who have reached this further stage are said by Aristotle to possess the virtues of the intellect as well as the virtues of the emotions. Aristotle doesn't as a matter of fact believe that most men are capable of reaching this further stage. The most that we can expect from them is the unthinking virtue of those who have been well trained. They are like the men in a modern totalitarian State or the soldiers in an army which fights bravely under orders without knowing for what it is fighting. Those, however, who possess the virtues of the intellect will realise in the light of intellectual understanding what

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things are valuable and ought therefore to be aimed at in life. These are questions to which the great Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, devoted much attention. Their answers demand a chapter to themselves.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### WHAT ARE THE THINGS IN LIFE THAT ARE REALLY VALUABLE?

THAT THERE MUST BE SOME THINGS WHICH ARE  
VALUABLE IN THEMSELVES

IF PLEASURE is not the only good, what other "goods" are there, or—to put the point in another way—what are the things that we desire as ends in themselves and not merely as means to other ends? For there must, it is obvious, be such things; since if we desire A for the sake of B, B for the sake of C, C for the sake of D, and so on for ever, we shall never come to a stop and there would, therefore, be no sufficient reason for desiring anything.

Thus men desire promotion at the office for the sake of increased pay, and increased pay for the sake of the things that it will buy—faster cars, perhaps, and larger houses and more elaborate dresses for their wives and holidays on the Riviera. And these things they desire for the sake of what? Showing off before the neighbours? Or because they think they are intrinsically desirable, which is only a technical way of saying that they desire them for their own sake? Again, let us suppose that you have a stomach ache. You need—the word "desire" hardly seems appropriate—something to appease your stomach, to make it quiet and take away the pain. You take chlorodyne, shall we say, or

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brandy or just an aspirin. And why should you want to get rid of the stomach ache? The answer is, because you don't like pain. And why don't you like pain? "A silly question" you might say, "to which there is no answer. I just don't and that is all there is to it."

Or you might have said, "I want to get rid of the stomach ache because I don't want to be ill." Why not? "Because I prefer health to disease." Why do you prefer it? At this point you can refuse to play this game of question and answer and put your foot down and say, "Well, I just do and that is the end of the matter." Or you might perhaps say, "Health makes for happiness and disease for misery." "So you want happiness, do you? Happiness for the sake of what?" To this most people would answer that we desire happiness for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else. You might even say, following the philosophers we considered in the last chapter but one, that happiness is the *only* thing that is desirable for itself.

Now although there may be, indeed are, many disagreements among philosophers as to what are the things which we desire for their own sakes, that is, as ends, on one point there is no disagreement, and that is that there must be some such things.

There are some things, then, which if the philosophers are right we desire as ends and not merely as means and pursue more or less whole-heartedly all through our lives, subordinating other ends to them, and suppressing contrary desires in order that we may pursue them more uninterruptedly. Thus a young man will suppress his desire to take his girl to the pictures and will sit at home and read for his examination instead, because he subordinates

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immediate pleasure to the overriding aim of "getting on in life."

Nor, I think, can there be any doubt—and most philosophers are agreed on this point too—that a life which is dominated by some such overriding purpose, whether it be the ambition to become a Member of Parliament or a millionaire or to serve mankind or merely to watch birds or collect butterflies or stamps, is likely to be more satisfactory than one which is a mere succession of different impulses and desires of which we satisfy as many as we can as and when they happen to crop up, without thought of any more ultimate end or more enduring purpose with which, perhaps, their satisfaction might interfere. We all feel instinctively that there is something wrong about a life which is simply "one damned thing after another." For that, precisely, when one comes to think of it, is the way the animals live.

What, then, are the things which it is worth while to pursue for their own sakes and not for the sake of anything else, of which happiness seems to be one and health, perhaps, another?

It is, it is obvious, very important to answer this question, which may be paraphrased, what are the true aims of life, since otherwise, to revert once again to Aristotle's metaphor, we shall be like archers shooting our arrows at random in the air, because we don't know what our target is or where; which, being translated, means that we shall waste our time and dissipate our energies in doing things we don't really want to do, because we haven't taken the trouble to discover the things that are really worth doing, which are also the ends which are really worth pursuing in the sense of being valuable

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for their own sakes and not merely as a means to some other end.

### THE ENDS WHICH MEN DO IN FACT PURSUE

#### 1. WEALTH

✚ In what follows I am going to summarize the thought of Plato who again and again in his various Dialogues, raises and discusses just this question. What, he wanted to know, is the true aim of life or, as he puts it, the true good for man.

But first what are the aims which men do in fact pursue? In the Athens of Plato's time, the fourth century B.C., they were much the same as they are in our own; money, power and the pleasures of the senses. To this we have added another, speed.

Let us first consider money and power. In our own time most people pursue wealth; in America, in which, precisely because it is the leading country of the modern world the characteristics of our civilisation are exhibited in their clearest and most developed forms, money seems for most people to be the *only* standard of value. By this I mean that Americans tend to estimate the worth of a man solely by reference to the amount of money that he possesses. They are always telling you (are they not?) how much things cost to buy or to make or to build, and they seem to think that the more they cost, the better they must be. And because they think that money is the only standard of value, they conclude that there is nothing that money cannot buy, nothing that money cannot do. Money, as they say, "talks."

During the war a friend of mine had the job of chauffeuse to high ranking officers in the American Army. She drove them about all over England

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wherever their duties might take them. It so happened that she had a number of friends who lived in old English country houses, and it seemed quite natural to her that, when she was in the neighbourhood of one of these houses, she should take her American passengers in for a cup of tea. But she discovered that whenever they found themselves in an old English country house with its tapestries, its panelling, its suits of armour, its porcelain vases, its family pictures, its old fashioned chairs and tables, they would try and buy whatever attracted them, making bids and offering money to their hosts. It never seemed to occur to them that some things were not for sale, and so my friend had to stop taking them into her friends' houses.

I am not suggesting that we in England are very different from the Americans in respect of the value that we place upon money. Most of *us* too think that to be rich is practically the same as to be in Heaven. But we do *sometimes* acknowledge other standards of value besides the monetary standard.

### 2. POWER

Whereas almost all men to-day and most men in all times have wanted money, the ablest and the strongest-willed men have wanted ~~power~~, power that is to say over other men. They have set their hearts on being emperors and kings and princes and generals, Prime Ministers, heads of Departments of State, heads of businesses and Principals of colleges, so that they could direct the course of events, make things happen because they willed them to happen, and order other men about. They have known that if they had power, other men would try to please them, to do them honour and humour their whims and fancies and give them presents—as all the peoples of Eastern Europe and most of the peoples



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of Asia send Stalin costly presents on his birthday—and fawn on them and toady to them. And if able men cannot succeed in becoming princes and governors and commissars and heads of departments and rule men, they will become headmasters and rule boys. The pleasures of power are the peculiar temptation of first rate men whose wills determination and abilities are above those of their fellows. These pleasures dominate their minds, overrule their wills, persuade their inclinations and charm them into compliance. Ordinary men want money, first rate men want power.

### 3. THE PLEASURES OF THE SENSES. SPEED

Thirdly, there are the pleasures of the senses, the pleasures of food and drink, of lying late in bed of a morning, of having a hot bath when you are tired and wet, above all the pleasures of sex. Perhaps under this head we ought to include the pleasures of speed, though this is a comparatively new kind of pleasure, a pleasure of which Plato had no inkling and could not, I think, have imagined.

For what an odd kind of pleasure, after all, is the pleasure of speed. The power of speed is the power rapidly to alter the position in space of pieces of matter, including that piece of matter which is one's own body. And why, one wonders, should anybody want to do that? But they do, especially young people. They think ten miles an hour ten times as wonderful as one mile an hour, a hundred miles an hour ten times as wonderful as ten miles an hour, and a thousand miles an hour practically the same as Heaven. They treat their bodies as though they were parcels, and mail them about all over the surface of the planet, the quicker the better, in trains and cars and on motor bikes, or through the air in aeroplanes or under the

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sea in submarines. They are always wanting to go to some place other than the place in which they are, and they always want to go there in a great hurry. If you ask them why behave in this way, they would not be able to answer you, for being ignorant, as Plato would say, of ends, they will move heaven and earth in order to save five minutes, and then not have the faintest idea what to do with them when they have saved them.

Now upon money and power and the pleasures of the senses and speed—if he had thought of speed—considered as objects of human desire, Plato made, or would have made, three critical comments. (a) The appetite grows through what it feeds on, so that men never think they have enough of them and are never satisfied. (b) They are what he calls finite or limited goods. (c) The pleasures which they bring are mixed or impure.

The third comment (c), applies more particularly to the pleasures of the senses; the second, (b), to power and wealth; while the first, (a), applies to all these false ends, as Plato called — or would have called them—that is to say, to wealth, to power, to the pleasures of the senses and to speed.

### I. PLATO ON FALSE GOODS

#### (a) THAT THE APPETITE GROWS THROUGH WHAT IT FEEDS ON

In its relation to speed this first comment requires little explanation. Speed considered as an end is unsatisfactory precisely because, however fast you go, there never comes a time when you think you are going fast enough, because there will always be someone who is going a little bit faster.

#### MONEY

So, too, with wealth; however much of it you

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have, and however much you may show it off with mink coats for your wife and Bentleys in the garage, there will always be somebody, a neighbour, a friend, a relative, who has more and can, therefore, make an even better display with furrier coats and glossier cars. Even when one reaches the millionaire class, there are small millionaires and big ones, and however big you are, there will always be somebody bigger, that is, somebody with *more* money. It is a well known fact that men who work and worry themselves all their lives to make money, when the time has come for them to retire and to enjoy the fruits of their life of toil, find themselves unable to do so but go on working and worrying at their businesses, partly because they never feel quite convinced that they have made enough, and partly because they find their lives unendurable without the hard labour to which they have become accustomed. For, you see, having never had time to learn how to enjoy themselves they are now too old to learn.

### PLEASURES OF THE SENSES

Similarly with the pleasures of the senses; people who have come to rely for their pleasures on food and drink instead of merely eating because they are hungry and drinking because they are thirsty, continue to eat and drink when they are neither hungry nor thirsty, for the sheer fun of doing so. They end up as gluttons and drunkards, because if eating and drinking are the ways in which you get your pleasure, it seems obvious that the more you eat and the more you drink, the more pleasure you will get at any rate up to a certain point, and when satiety is reached and even *you* cannot eat any more, you can by training and exercise so develop your appetite that, given the appropriate stimulus, goose's liver, perhaps, or caviare or oysters, you

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will be able in an hour or two to begin all 'over again. (As a matter of fact the Romans, having eaten as much as they could, were in the habit of taking something to make them sick, so that they *could* begin all over again.)

### POWER

It is, however, in regard to power that the growth of the appetite with what it feeds on is most notorious. Men seek power for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are good reasons; they wish to save their country or to liberate a subject people from its oppressors or, like the pioneers of the Russian Revolution, to remedy social injustice and to strike the chains of poverty from the arms of the people.

But power, once obtained, is found to be so delightful that men will think of any excuse to retain it. Anything, they feel, would be better than to lose this so attractive power. Thus all the dictators and absolute rulers that the world has ever known—with, I believe, only one exception, the Roman dictator Sulla—have clung to power right up to the very last moment. That is one of the reasons why, as time passes, dictatorships tend to grow more and not less extreme. Because the appetite for power grows with its exercise, dictators grow dissatisfied with the amount of power they already have; they wish to experience the delights of power more intensely and more continuously; hence as time passes they throw their weight about ever more flagrantly. Moreover, their oppressions and cruelties raise up against them enemies amongst their subjects. They know that other men are jealous of their power, and presently begin to suspect that everybody is plotting against them. Hence they find ever more people to behead, to hang, to shoot, to imprison and to exile; in this way

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they feel their power and make it felt by others. The Nazi dictatorship in Germany and the present dictatorship of the Communist Party in Russia offer good examples of these truths. The Bolsheviks came to power to champion the cause of the oppressed working classes in all the countries of the world and to reduce the flagrant inequalities of wealth which disgrace most civilised countries in which the many are poor to the point of starvation, while the few have more money than they know how to spend. Their revolution succeeded, the capitalists were liquidated, the middle classes destroyed and it seemed that the cause of the people had triumphed. But today Russia is ruled by a dictatorship as absolute and as ruthless as any that history has known, nor does it appear to be likely to be displaced except by the use of force.

Thus power which is seized upon for one set of reasons in order that by its exercise ends of value may be achieved, is retained for another, because of the pleasure that men take in it. But like the pleasures of the senses, the pleasures of power presently begin to pall and, as the drug taker has to increase the doses of the drug, the wielder of power has to accumulate ever more and more power, and to use it ever more ruthlessly in order to obtain from it the same amount of satisfaction.

Hence Plato's comment would be that power, like wealth and the pleasures of the senses, is unsatisfactory as an end because, however much you have, you never think you have enough. It was for this reason that he laid it down in his ideal State that only those who did not want power could safely be entrusted with its exercise.

And in case all these examples may seem to you abstract and remote, let me revert to

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one which falls within your own experience, the case of cigarette smoking. When you first start smoking cigarettes, every cigarette is felt as a definite pleasure. Consequently you smoke more and more cigarettes, in the hope of obtaining more and more pleasure. Presently a need for cigarettes is established and you begin to feel that there is a something lacking when you are *not* smoking. Hence, whereas when you began it, cigarette smoking had a plus value, that is to say, it involved a definite increase of pleasure as compared with what there was before, it now merely redresses a minus value, restoring the smoker to a condition which is normal, that is to say, neither pleasurable nor painful, by allaying the feeling of vague discomfort which he experiences when he is not smoking. Thus the confirmed cigarette smoker expends an ever greater amount of money and time in getting a constantly diminishing amount of satisfaction.

### (b) THE NATURE OF FINITE OR LIMITED GOODS

Plato's comment under this head applies more particularly to wealth and power considered as objects of desire and pursuit. It is to the effect that both are limited, that is to say, there is not an indefinite amount of them to go round. This is obvious in respect of the small sums of money in which most of us deal. If I win a bob off you in a bet, the fact that I have it means that you have lost it; we cannot, that is to say, both have it. In the case of power not only does my having it mean your not having it, but your not having it is a condition of my having it; that is to say, I can have it only if you don't. For the use of power requires not only the power exerciser but somebody over whom power is exercised. Being a headmaster entails the existence of other masters, being a master, the existence

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of boys, being a monitor or prefect, of smaller boys and so on. Whenever a person, however humble, has power, there must be somebody humbler still by whom the weight of his power is felt. As the great English satirist, Dean Swift put it:

Big fleas have little fleas  
Upon their backs to bite 'em.  
Little fleas have smaller fleas,  
And so ad infinitum.

Now this limited character of wealth and power considered as objects of human desire and as goals of human endeavour has, Plato points out, two evil consequences. First, since there is not enough to go round, people will struggle for what there is. Secondly, the facts that there is a distinction in the case both of wealth and power between what is mine and what is yours, so that if I have it you don't have it, and that this distinction runs right through the community, mean that the community will be divided against itself and will, therefore, be neither peaceful nor united. This is how Plato, who is talking of cities in which men set wealth before themselves as their main object, puts it:—"For each of them, as the saying runs, is no city but cities upon cities; two at the least, each other's enemies, the city of the poor and the city of the rich; and in either of these is a vast number of cities which you would be entirely wrong to treat as one."

History has fully borne out Plato's account. On the first point, capitalist society, that is to say, a society in which the main incentive to effort is the desire for monetary profit, has often been likened to a jungle in which men fight with one another to see who can get the greatest share of business and, therefore, of profit. The philosophy of Marxism which is dominant in Russia seems to suggest that

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economic goods, that is to say, in the last resort, money and the material things that money can buy, are the only things that men really desire, and that their struggle to obtain the largest share of them is what determines the course of history. On the second point, the struggle between rich and poor, between those who possess wealth and power and those who are dispossessed of both, has been the major factor in the history of most modern States. It was, for instance, the main cause of the French and the Russian Revolutions, and it is still going on between capitalist and Communist countries all over the world. Indeed, through all modern States there runs the division between those who have and those who have not money and power, so that they are not single and united States but are divided internally against themselves.

### (c) "IMPURE" PLEASURES

Plato's third comment, which applies more particularly to the pleasures of the senses, is that they are impure. The word "impure" as here used has nothing to do with morality; it means mixed—mixed, in fact, with pain. Most of our pleasures, Plato points out, arise in consequence of a preceding state of need or want to which they are relative. Thus the pleasure of the convalescent is dependent upon his relief from the pains of his preceding illness; of the resting man, upon his preceding fatigue; of the water-drinking man, upon his preceding thirst. These states and activities, convalescing, resting, water-drinking, are accompanied by the sort of pleasure whose nature, when it is experienced in its crudest form, as relief from long and wearing pain, we all recognise for what it is. We recognise, that is to say, that the pleasure experienced on relief from pain owes its pleasantness



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solely to the fact that we are no longer suffering the pain which we formerly suffered. These, then, are impure pleasures, since they are mixed with something else, namely, the pain upon which their occurrence depends, and to which they are relative, so that without the pain they could not occur.

### SCHOPENHAUER'S PESSIMISM

A modern German philosopher, named Schopenhauer, went further than Plato and deduced from the fact that most pleasures are dependent upon a state of preceding need or want, a pessimistic doctrine about human life. He argued as follows :— The discomfort of want causes a man to take action which is designed to satisfy the want. When the want is satisfied, the man feels pleasure, but feels it only for a moment, since, as the condition of wanting or needing is the very stuff of life, the satisfied want is immediately replaced by another. Since the pleasure which attends the satisfaction of want is dependent upon the pre-existence of the want which it satisfies, we cannot obtain the pleasure of satisfaction without undergoing the preceding pain of want—we cannot, in short, feast unless we are first prepared to fast—so that the attempt to enjoy the pleasure after the want is satisfied results only in boredom and satiety. It is for this reason that those who pursue the so-called life of pleasure, who aim, that is to say, at the continual enjoyment of pleasure without experiencing the intervening pain of want, obtain very little of the pleasures they seek.

In fact, they make a double mistake. In the first place, they endeavour to enjoy a condition (that of pleasure), which is dependent upon another state (that of need or want) without undergoing that other state; in the second, they strive to render that which is by its very nature transitory and intermit-

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tent—since pleasure, which is dependent on the satisfaction of need, disappears when the need which it satisfies is no longer felt—continuous.

Since the pain of need or desire is a permanent condition of living, and the pleasure of satisfaction is transitory, life must, according to Schopenhauer, be regarded as a failure in the sense that its pains must exceed its pleasures. For we cannot remain satisfied, try as we may, but are driven forward by the remorseless urge of life, expressing itself in a continuously recurring series of new wants and impelling us to make ever fresh efforts to satisfy them. These may or may not be successful but the pleasure of success is precarious and short, while the pain of newly recurring want is certain.

Plato does not accept Schopenhauer's pessimistic conclusion because he proceeds to point out that there are some pleasures, mainly those of the mind and spirit, which are *not* dependent upon a preceding craving and are, therefore, as he would put it, "pure." The goals which we should be wise to pursue consist, then, for him in the goods of the mind and spirit, and the good and successful life will be found in their pursuit. Let us consider what these goods are, bearing in mind Plato's three comments which we will take in their reverse order.

## II. PLATO ON TRUE GOODS

### (a) "PURE" PLEASURES

As I have said, these are those of the mind and spirit. As we shall see in the last chapter,\* Plato held that the familiar world of things which move about in space and change in time is not the only world, and that there is another world or order of reality, as he called it, which is changeless and

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\* See Chapter Eight, pages 158—163.

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perfect, and of which, if we had the right training and lived the right kind of life, we could attain to a knowledge. To attain knowledge of this world was, he held, the purpose of life. But without proceeding to such heroic lengths, it is possible to see his point in regard to the pleasures of the mind.

Now, there is no doubt that intense mental activity in pursuit of something worth while can be a pleasure. (For my part, I venture here to put it on record that work in some form or other—in my case it has been mainly intellectual work—is the only occupation that I have been able to stand in any but the smallest doses. I quickly get bored with almost everything else.) There is the pleasure of intellectual curiosity, of wanting to know and finding out; the pleasure of research, of arranging your material, of mastering your subject, of solving a problem or of reaching some sort of conclusion, however provisional. Or there is the pleasure of reading, of finding out what great men have thought and said memorably about life, and considering its bearing on your own life. Now in Plato's sense of the word, these pleasures are "pure." There is, that is to say, no craving for them to make you miserable when you are *not* enjoying them, nor is their enjoyment dependent upon need or want. Similarly with such intellectual games as chess or draughts. You enjoy playing chess, but you are not restless or discontented when you are not playing.

The most easily enjoyed of the pleasures of the spirit are the pleasures of art—of music, of poetry, of painting—and of nature. And here again the same conclusion holds true. Whatever pleasure you may get from music or poetry—and these, for some, are the most delightful pleasures that life has to offer—you are not sensible of any discomfort when you are not enjoying them. The same is true of the

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pleasures of nature; you may find walking across country or climbing mountains or wandering down a lane in spring among the pleasantest things that ever happen to you in life, but your pleasure in them is, not mixed up with and dependent upon a craving for them when you are not having them.

For my part, I think that Plato is a little over-strict when he seeks to confine pure pleasures to those of the mind and the spirit. I enjoy chocolate peppermint creams—at any rate I enjoy the first two or three of them—enormously, but I don't believe that my pleasure in them is dependent upon a condition of craving for them when I am not eating them. So, too, the pleasure of smelling a flower seems to be a wholly "pure" pleasure. It looks, then, as if the pleasures of the intellect, of art, and some of the pleasures of the senses might be included in the class of pure pleasures. Such is Plato's first advice as to the goals or objects of right living. We should pursue those things which are the sources of "pure" pleasures.

### (b) UNLIMITED GOODS

Secondly, let us consider unlimited goods which are also infinitely divisible goods. There are, it is obvious, certain good things in life which are such that, if I possess and enjoy them, my possession and enjoyment does not prevent you from possessing and enjoying. Chief among them Plato puts, once again, the pleasures of the mind. Learning and study, the pleasure we take in mastering a difficult subject, the thrill of exploration and discovery in the physical world—for example, being the first to penetrate to the South Pole, or to find a new kind of orchid—or in the sphere of the intellect, in the solving of a problem in mathematics or even in chess or in the discovery of a new formula in physics—these

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things, it is obvious, can be indefinitely shared, that is to say the fact that I have done or am doing them does not prevent you from doing them, for there is always enough to go round. Indeed, there are activities such as that of scientific research, where the circumstance that many are working together in the same field of enquiry gives an added enjoyment to the work just because many are co-operating in it.

Similarly with the pleasures, such as they are, of creation in the arts. I say "such as they are" because though they are undoubtedly great, they are shot through with so much in the way of barrenness when no inspiration comes, or frustration,—when it comes but cannot be expressed in paint or sound or words—that to describe them as pleasurable is to say what is, perhaps, the least important thing about them. Indeed few, if any, great artists would say that it was pleasure that they were in search of.

Similarly with the pleasures of artistic appreciation. There is no limit to the number of people who can read a great book or get pleasure from a poem, while my enjoyment of a concert does not—at least I hope it does not—interfere with yours. On the contrary, there is good evidence for the view that while many pleasures are the better for being shared, of no pleasure is this truer than of our pleasure in beauty in all the forms of its manifestation. When, for example, you are in love there is nothing that gives greater happiness or brings two lovers more closely together than reading a poem, going to a concert or enjoying a walk in the country, when you know that your own delight is shared with and so intensified by the equal delight of the loved person.

This last example brings me to the pleasure we take in nature. This is not the place in which to

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speak in detail of this exceedingly complicated pleasure whose roots stretch back into man's primitive past and which yet seems at times to be akin to the pleasures of the artist, to be, in fact, an enjoyment of the spirit. (It is the townsman rather than the peasant or the farmer who appreciates and loves the beauty of nature.) I content myself, then, with pointing out that this too is an unlimited good, since the fact that I enjoy it, revelling let us say in the bite and briskness of a sunny frosty morning, or the sights and smells and sounds of a world bursting into leaf and bloom and song in early spring, or the view of a sunset out at sea seen from the top of a mountain, does not prevent your enjoyment of the same things. (But perhaps I had better guard myself by saying again "at least I hope that it does not." At any rate it should not. Yet many of us at the present time are busy with our cars and motor bikes and caravans and hotels and aeroplanes and Nissen huts and pylons and cement works and hydro-electric works and pink housing estates and whatever else in the way of progress there may be, in spoiling the enjoyment of nature for the rest of us, as hard as we can.) These, then, are examples of unlimited and, therefore, infinitely divisible goods. Because they are unlimited we do not quarrel about who is to have most of them or fight for a larger share than our neighbours.

### (c) SATISFYING GOODS

It is, I suppose, true that the wise man never thinks that he has enough wisdom, the learned man enough knowledge, or the good man enough virtue. Indeed, in this last case he could not think so, since if he thought that he was really good or at any rate good enough, he would be complacent and self-satisfied and to that extent would fall short of real

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goodness. But this feeling, that you would like to be better or wiser than you are, is quite different from the restlessness and dissatisfaction which comes from what Plato calls the insatiable craving of desire. For the appetites simply won't let you alone. If you are a sensualist in matters of sex, a glutton or drunkard in matters of food and drink, or a drug addict, you may succeed in satisfying your desires for a time; but, before you know where you are, there they are back again nagging at you for more satisfaction, so that, once again, you must set to work to appease them with more sexual enjoyment, more food or drink or drugs, so that you never have a moment's peace. So, too, with power. You are, we will suppose, promoted to a high position, to an assistant managership, let us say. For a time you are pleased and satisfied, and then your ambition once again begins to get to work and nags at you and won't let you alone, until you have become the manager. And once you have been established as manager you look about you and notice that much larger and more important concern over the road, and then you are not satisfied until you have become manager of *that*. So, too, with fame. You may for the moment be satisfied with the glory that scoring a fifty at cricket brings you, but pretty soon you will be wanting to score a hundred and will remain dissatisfied until you do. Hence, as Plato puts it, the man who is dominated by an appetite or an ambition is a man in bondage, enslaved to the demands of a master who is never satisfied.

But though a man may also say that he "desires" to be better or wiser, this desire is of a different kind. It is less like an appetite that clamours when it is not fed and more like the deliberate act of will which we perform when we have to face something which is superficially difficult or unpleasant, like climbing

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a rock face or plunging into cold water. Now nobody could pretend that a man is made miserable when he is *not* doing these things.

Aristotle goes further than Plato, and thinks of desire and craving in a purely physical way. Think of the body as a kind of tank or reservoir. Every time a desire is satisfied it is as if the tank were emptied. Presently, however, it begins to fill up again and when it is full it makes itself such a nuisance that we simply have to empty it again before we can be restored to reasonable contentment. Hence, the satisfaction of the appetites does not advance or improve us or add anything to us; it merely brings us, as it were, back to scratch by draining off the surplus of water in the tank, so that we are once again restored to normality. The case of the cigarette smoker cited above is a good example of Aristotle's point.

But an increase of wisdom or knowledge or virtue is a definite acquisition, something that is, as it were, added to our natures so that it is taken into and becomes part of ourselves, and is never lost.

The conclusion of the whole matter is plain enough. If you are looking for a good or worthy object in life, something that is really worth while, and will bring you permanent satisfaction, you will be well advised to "go for" the goods of the mind and the spirit, for art or science or learning or scholarship or religion or the service of your fellow men, since, in so doing, you will be making an investment, which, though the immediate returns may be small, will pay ever greater dividends as your life proceeds.



## PART TWO THE PROBLEM OF REALITY

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### INTRODUCTION

#### THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN APPEARANCE AND REALITY

OUR BOOK hitherto has dealt with that branch of philosophy which is called Ethics. Ethics, as we have seen, enquires into such questions as what is meant by the word "good"; how is right conduct to be distinguished from wrong; what is meant by the word "ought" when, for example, we say that a man "*ought*" to do so-and-so though he *wants* to do something else; what things are valuable in and for themselves and so on, and it is with these questions and with some of the answers that philosophers have given to them that we have been concerned.

Another branch of philosophy which is sometimes called metaphysics is concerned with questions relating to the ultimate nature of things. I use the word "ultimate" to indicate that the interest of metaphysics lies in the question, what is the universe like in its true nature like, like, that is to say, in reality?

This question comes up in the following way. The universe *seems* to be made up of things moving about in space. But if we examine the nature of these things by the methods of chemistry and physics, they turn out to be particles called atoms

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which are composed of various kinds of electricity. Is the world, then, ultimately "made of" electricity, or of that even more fundamental stuff, whatever it may be, into which electricity may one day itself be analysed? Many have thought so; they are called materialists and their view will be considered in the next chapter.

But there are obvious difficulties about this view. Atoms, for example, are neither coloured nor noisy, nor do they smell. But the world certainly appears to be full of colours, noises and smells. Appears to whom or what? Appears to our minds and senses. Are our minds and senses then made of matter? Are they, in fact, only electricity? If so, matter, that is to say bits of electrical stuff or energy moving about in space, must be conscious in the sense of being able to know other bits of the same stuff or energy. This certainly seems difficult to believe. Moreover where, we must ask, do the colours, sounds and smells come from? The obvious answer is that our minds created or invented them and projected them, as it were, on to the bits of stuff. But can the bits of electrical stuff or energy, which, on this view, our minds *are*, which are themselves without colour, sound or smell, contrive to create colours, sounds and smells? It seems extremely unlikely.

Some philosophers have held that mind alone is real and that matter is an illusion or a creation of mind, and that the universe is, therefore, "ultimately" made of or consists of minds and their experiences. These philosophers are called idealists and I will say something about their views in the next chapter but one.

But whatever view as to the nature of the universe we may ultimately decide to adopt, it is hard to

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believe that the everyday picture of the world as consisting of material things moving about in space, tells us the truth about the universe; at any rate it doesn't tell us the whole truth.

There is also the question of purpose and design. It certainly looks as if somebody must have put the matter there, as if that is to say, someone created the universe, and it is hard to understand how this could have been done by anything or anybody but a mind. Now minds have purposes; the universe, then, may well have been created for a purpose; so may our own minds.

Hence arises the distinction which philosophers have made between the world as it seems to be and the world as it really is. This distinction is not difficult to understand. Suppose, to take an analogy, that you were a tapeworm which was born, lived and died in somebody's stomach. Now the world as it appeared to you would be very different from the world as it appears to me, different and, I imagine, more limited. In particular you would have very restricted views on the question of what it is to be a human being, since a human being would appear to you only as a collection of organs and entrails. It might never occur to you that those organs and entrails were only parts or aspects of a whole, a living human being who was more than the sum of all of them taken together, just as a completed jigsaw puzzle is more than the sum of its pieces taken separately. There would, then, be for you a difference between the appearance and the reality of a human being.

So, too, many philosophers have insisted, is it with us, their idea being that we occupy, in regard to the universe as a whole, much the same position as my imaginary tapeworm does in regard to a living

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human body; we don't, that is to say, see the universe as it really is, but only as it appears to our limited and restricted point of view. We are all familiar with the notion that a dog can smell smells which are outside the range of our less delicate smelling apparatus. But this notion can be extended beyond the confines of our physical senses. There may, for example, be aspects of reality which our limited *minds* may be unable to grasp. Again, if you admit that there is such a thing as a soul, there may be spiritual aspects of reality which are hidden from our comparatively primitive and undeveloped souls, aspects which other beings, for example, God, could grasp. Reality, then, as opposed to appearance, might, on this view, be defined as the universe as God sees it and knows it.

Most philosophers have held that there is some kind of distinction between appearance and reality, and have believed that the object of philosophy, indeed the object of all thinking about the world, is to penetrate through the veil of appearance, as they have called it, to a knowledge of the reality that lies behind and beyond it. But, though they have agreed about the distinction, different philosophers have conceived of reality in different ways. One such attempt to picture the nature of reality will be considered in our final chapter. The word metaphysics is usually employed in philosophy to denote the theory of reality in its relation both to the minds of men who try to know it and to the world of everyday things in which our bodies move and have their being.

Now these questions have a bearing upon those which we have hitherto considered, a bearing, that is to say, on ethics. If the world of things moving about in space and changing in time, the world that

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we know by means of our senses and that science studies, is the only world, then most of the notions whose meaning we have hitherto been engaged in discussing, the notions of right and good and ought and so on, will be meaningless or, more precisely, they will be analysable into some consideration like that of far-sighted expediency or that of long-term selfishness—for example, “this is right” equals, on this view, “this is what the general opinion of mankind or of my particular community has found to be useful to society,” or “this is what conduces to success in the individual,” or “this is what is liable to produce happiness”—and some view of the kind we considered in Chapters I and III will be correct. For if the universe consists of matter moving about in space it cannot, it is obvious, have either meaning or purpose, and if there is no meaning or purpose in the universe, what other motive for conduct can we have except the motive of doing the best for ourselves that we can—“best” meaning most conducive to our own advantage—or of assisting the smooth working of our society.

If, on the other hand, the level of reality on which we normally live and on which our bodies move is not the only level, if there is another more “ultimate” reality, of which this level is an appearance, a spiritual reality, it may be, or at any rate an immaterial one, then the universe may have a meaning and purpose. What is more, it may be our duty—that which we were created for the express purpose of carrying out—to try to fathom the meaning and to further the purpose. Now many, perhaps most, philosophers have taken this line. They have held that notions such as those denoted by the words “good” and “beauty” are only

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really intelligible on some such assumption as this. For my part, I think that they are right; but whether they are right or wrong, the way in which the views we hold on ethical questions depend upon and derive from our views about the nature of the universe as a whole is, I hope, sufficiently clear. In the last three chapters of this book, then, I propose to consider very briefly some of the views which philosophers have put forward in regard to the general character of the universe considered as a whole. This will also involve us in some consideration of the question, is there a distinction between the world as it appears and the world as it really is.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THAT EVERYTHING IS MATTER

#### THE ASSUMPTION ON WHICH SCIENCE RESTS

I PROPOSE first to consider the philosophical view which maintains that everything, including what is called mind, is really matter in one or other of its many forms, and obeys, therefore, the laws of physics and chemistry. This view has been chiefly maintained by men of science; it can, however, be worked up into a philosophy, that is to say, into a general account of the universe as a whole, in which connection it goes by the name of Materialism. Nor is it difficult to see why this is the view that men of science should be naturally disposed to adopt. If we were to ask the question, "what is it that science is trying to do?" the shortest and most accurate answer would be "to discover and chart the laws according to which things behave." Thus science discovers and announces a law according to which water at sea level freezes at  $32^{\circ}$  and boils at  $212^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit; another, according to which the rate of acceleration of the falling of unsupported bodies is the same irrespective of their weight; another, according to which the attraction of bodies in empty space varies inversely with the square of the distance between them; another, according to which the combination of two units of hydrogen with one of oxygen is water; and so on.

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The discovery of these laws has a practical advantage. It enables us to predict what is going to happen before it does; to predict, for example, that the sun will rise to-morrow in the east, that there will be an eclipse of the moon on such and such a day in a month's time, that water that freezes will expand, that shoals of herrings will be found in the North Sea round about a certain date, that if diabetics take insulin the excess of sugar in their system will be corrected. Science makes these predictions because under similar conditions similar happenings have been observed to occur a great many times in the past. Hence the whole fabric of science rests upon the assumption that given similar conditions, things of the same kind as those that have happened in the past will continue to happen in the future. To predict future happenings is to enable us to control them by altering the conditions as a result of which they occur. Thus, through its success in understanding the workings of nature, science has been able to modify them in ways which satisfy human desires.

Now, both the laws and the predictions which are made in accordance with them rest upon an assumption. The assumption is that the same causes will, given the same conditions, always produce the same results; also that no arbitrary agency from outside, that is to say, some agency which is *not* subject to the law of causation, will intervene to prevent these results.

### THE INTERVENTIONS OF MIND

Now mind as commonly conceived is an agency of just this kind. For example, it is natural for a man's soft, warm body to shrink from the impact of cold water; but mind apparently intervenes and by the



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exercise of will-power causes the body which it animates to take the plunge. It is natural for a living body, observing a small object travelling with great velocity in its direction to remove itself from the path of this object. But if you are a fieldsman standing at slip, you not only don't get your body out of the way of the ball but actually extend your soft hands in such a way that it will hit them in order to arrest its flight and, if possible, to retain it. Why? Because an act of will has been exercised with the deliberate object of interfering with the body's natural reaction, and of causing a piece of matter, the matter, namely, of which the body is composed, to behave in ways which the laws of physics, chemistry and physiology as formulated by science could not have predicted.

Again, heavy objects, if left to themselves do not rise from the ground, nor does water flow uphill. But as the result of the intervention of man's mind, aeroplanes are constructed which ascend into the air, and fountains which cause water to spurt upwards instead of flowing downwards. This doesn't, of course, mean that man's mind has altered the laws which govern the behaviour of matter. The normal machinery consisting of nerves and sinews and muscles and of nerve messages travelling from the brain to the limbs which causes the body to plunge into the water and the arms to stretch themselves out in the direction of the approaching ball is not dispensed with; the laws of dynamics and statics are not superseded by aeroplanes which remain in the air, nor are the principles of physics suspended when water flows upwards instead of downwards. What has happened is that mind has intervened to alter the conditions so that the workings of the laws which science investigates operate to

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cause matter to behave in ways which, if there had been no intervention on the part of mind, would have been unpredicted and, indeed, unaccountable.

In other words, if you go back far enough along the chain of physical causes which lead up to the behaviour of the diving body and the outstretched hand, the flight of aeroplanes and the jet of fountains, of all of which happenings science can give a perfectly good account, since they take place in accordance with known laws, you will come sooner or later upon one happening which appears not to be physical at all, namely, upon an act of will in the case of the body and hand, upon a series of mathematical calculations in the case of the aeroplane and a knowledge of physics, hydraulics and mathematics in the case of the fountain.

Now if these acts of will, if these operations and calculations on the part of mind are really what they seem to be, science can give no account of them at all. For if they really are what they seem to be, they are free—I *freely* will to stretch out my arm, the inventor *freely* sets his mind to work to devise an aeroplane—and are not, therefore, caused at all. Therefore (1) they are unpredictable and (2) they don't take place in accordance with the laws that science investigates and prescribes. Now that this should be so is, from the point of view of science, something of an outrage.

### FREEDOM OF THE WILL A SCIENTIFIC OUTRAGE

For consider two points. First, some of the actions which appear to be caused by a free act of will are indistinguishable from those which take place naturally according to the laws of physics and physiology. Thus if I cross my right leg over my left and *will* slightly to raise the right foot, the foot

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can be seen to jerk into the air; but if somebody taps my leg with the side of his hand just below the knee the foot will jerk into the air in just the same way. The two movements of the foot are indistinguishable, yet the first is the result of an act of will, that is to say, of an intervention by mind into the world of physical happenings, the second, which is called a reflex action, takes place wholly within the scheme of physical law which science studies, the relevant laws being in this case chiefly those of physiology. It seems to follow that you can never tell in respect of any movement on the part of a piece of matter that it may *not* have been caused by a mind; you can never, therefore, be quite safe, if the existence of a free mind is admitted, in predicting any material occurrence.

Secondly, let us suppose that an act of will directs the fingers of a dictator who is signing a mobilisation order. As a consequence an enormous number of physical happenings take place all over the world. Moreover, these happenings go on for a long time—it may be for ever—that is to say, occurrences hundreds of years hence may well be different from what they would have been, if the dictator had not *willed* to use his fingers to sign the mobilisation order. Thus, once again, a scientist regarding the movements of pieces of matter can never be quite sure that, if he goes back far enough, he will not find in the chain of causation which led up to them one event which was an act of free will and not, therefore, explicable in terms of the laws which science studies. This means, of course, that none of the happenings which succeed and result from the act of will is in the last resort *fully* explicable by scientific laws.

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That is why the notion of a freely operating mind expressing itself in acts of will is an outrage from the point of view of science. It plays havoc with the calculating and predicting on which science relies.

But all that we have said rests, it is obvious, on the assumption that minds are what we normally take them to be and that the acts of will in which minds express themselves are really free, that is to say, uncaused. If they could be shown to be not free but to be caused like other happenings, if, in other words, they could be brought within the scientific fold, then the outrage would disappear. Now this precisely is what Materialism seeks to do, which is why Materialism has always been popular with men of science. For if it can be shown that the mind, too, is part of the general scheme of natural causes and events, then the events that occur in a mind, including thoughts and acts of will, will be brought within the scientific fold and everything will be orderly and nothing unpredictable. In fact, as a nineteenth century materialist called Tyndall put it, speaking at a meeting of the British Association, science would one day be able to explain all that has happened and all that does happen in the universe in terms of the "ultimately purely natural and inevitable march of evolution from the atoms of the primeval nebula to the proceedings of the British Association for the advancement of science."

How does the materialist set about this task? Before I try to answer that question I must say a word on three topics. First, what is normally meant by mind ; secondly, the machinery of sensation ; and thirdly, the mystery which the fact of sensation entails.

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### 1. WHAT IS NORMALLY MEANT BY A MIND

We normally believe that a man is not all body; that in addition to the matter of which his body is composed his total make up includes something that we call a mind. Now this mind which we suppose to exist is not to be confused with a brain. If you were to cut open a man's head, you would see inside his skull a mass of greyish material known as the cerebral cortex which surrounds the brain, much as the peel surrounds an orange. Within this outer layer there is an immensely numerous and complicated mass of nerve tissue, tiers upon tiers and layers upon layers of little cells. All this is the brain. It is material and analysable by chemistry and physics like any other piece of matter into molecules, elements, atoms and electrons.

Bits of matter, we are accustomed to suppose, can not think, feel nor will. They can only move about. It is the mind that thinks, the mind that feels, the mind that wills. The mind, then, though it may be closely related to and even, perhaps, dependent upon the brain, is not the brain. Presumably, therefore, it is not material at all, since if it were material, it would be identical with or at least part of the brain. If it is not material it is not in the head; indeed, it isn't anywhere at all, since only material things occupy space. The mind, then, is one thing and the brain another.

### 2. THE MACHINERY OF SENSATION

Let us suppose that I perceive something in the outside world, a pillar box, for example, which, as I say, I see or a pin prick which, as I say, I feel. What precisely has happened? So far as the sciences of physics and physiology take us, what happens is very briefly as follows:—

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In the pillar box case, light rays travelling from it at the rate of 186 thousand miles a second, reach the place where the retinas of my eyes are. They impinge upon the retinas causing a disturbance in the rods and cones of which the retinas are composed. This disturbance is conveyed to the optic cord, along which it travels in the form of a series of nervous impulses until it reaches the brain. (Nervous impulses are analysable, like all other physical happenings, into the movements of atoms and electrons, that is to say into the propagation along the nerves of charges of positive and negative electricity.) When what we may loosely refer to as the pillar box message despatched from the retinas of the eyes, reaches the brain, it causes an extremely complicated disturbance in the tiers and layers of cells of which, as we have seen, the brain is composed. When, and only when, these complicated events have taken place in the brain, I shall have the sensation of seeing the pillar box. In other words, the proximate *physical* cause of my seeing anything at all is the occurrence of certain physical happenings in the brain. Provided that these take place, and that they are of the right kind, I shall still have the sensation of seeing the pillar box even if there is no pillar box there for me to see. This, indeed, is what may frequently happen in the case of the event which we call seeing a star. Light rays travelling from the star, reach the place where my eyes and brain are only after several months or even years. During these months or years the star may have gone out of existence, but provided that the light waves cause the requisite events in my brain I shall still have the sensation of seeing it.

Similarly, drunkards see two pillar boxes instead of one, people see ghosts, and travellers in the desert

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mirages, not because these objects are, as it were, *there* but because the appropriate kind of happenings have taken place in their brains.

In the case of the pin prick, which we will suppose to be in one of the fingers, there is a disturbance in the nerve cells composing the finger tips. This disturbance is conveyed from nerve to nerve along what is called the receptor nervous system which runs from my hand, up my arm and along my shoulder until it is transferred via the neck to the brain where it causes *its* appropriate disturbance in the brain cells. When this series of nervous messages has reached the brain, and not before, I shall have the sensation of a prick in my finger.

All the infinitely varied and complicated information which I receive about the outside world reaches me along these and similar channels. Block the channels, for example, by paralysing the nerves in my arm or put a sense organ out of action, for example, by damaging or covering an eye, and there will be no reception of a stimulus, or even if there is, no message will travel from the sense organ to the brain and consequently there will be no sensation of feeling or touching. The mind, then, appears to be dependent for its knowledge of the outside world upon happenings in the brain which is part of the body which the mind, as we say, animates.

How does the mind get this information? What, in other words, is the nature of the machinery which conveys to the mind the news of the disturbances caused by the arrival of the messages in the brain so that our minds become, as we say, conscious of the objects which originated the disturbance? We don't know, a fact which brings me to:

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### 3. THE MYSTERY

The mystery arises from the fact of mind-body interaction. Let me try first of all to show that this is, or, at any rate, appears to be a fact by giving a few examples.

Mind interacts with and influences body and body mind at every moment of our waking lives. If I am drunk I see two lamp-posts instead of one; if I fail to digest my supper I have a nightmare and see blue devils; if I smoke opium or inhale nitrous oxide gas I shall see rosy coloured visions and pass into a state of beatitude. These are instances of the influence of the body upon the mind. If I see a ghost my hair will stand on end; if I am moved to anger my face will become red; if I receive a sudden shock I shall go pale. These are instances of the influence of the mind upon the body.

The examples just quoted are only extreme and rather obvious cases of what is going on all the time. Many thinkers, indeed, assert that mind and body are so intimately associated that there can be no event in the one which does not produce some corresponding event in the other, although the corresponding event may be too small to be noticed. The interaction between mind and body is, at any rate, a fact beyond dispute. Yet when we come to reflect upon the manner of the interaction, it is exceedingly difficult to see how it can occur. Let me venture to emphasise again the point made above, namely, that the mind must be something which is immaterial; if it were material, it would be part of the body. The contents of, and the events which happen in the mind—that is to say, wishes, desires, thoughts, aspirations, hopes, and acts of will—are also immaterial. The body, on the other hand, is matter and possesses the usual qualities of matter, such as



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size, weight, density, inertia, occupancy of space, and so forth.

Now there is no difficulty in understanding how one material thing can be influenced by another. Each possesses the same attributes of size, shape, and weight, in virtue of which each can, as it were, communicate with or "get at" the other. Thus a paving stone can crush an egg because the egg belongs to the same order of being as the stone. But how can the paving stone crush a wish, or be affected by a thought? Material force and mass have no power of ideas; ideas do not exert force nor do they yield to mass. How, in short, can that which has neither size, weight nor shape, which cannot be seen, heard or touched, and which does not occupy space, come into contact with that which has these properties?

Mind and matter seem, then, to belong to two different worlds, to partake of two different orders of being, and the problem of their interaction is the problem of the whale and the elephant raised to the  $n$ th degree.

It is the apparently insoluble character of this problem that constitutes one of the starting points of Materialism, for all the attempts that have been made to deal with it on the assumption that mind and matter are *really* different seem hopelessly inadequate.

### DESCARTES AND LEIBNIZ.

There is, for example, the suggestion of the philosopher Descartes which came to be known as Occasionalism. According to this view, mind and body proceed on two parallel lines, the point of the word "parallel" being that parallel lines don't intersect. Nevertheless, every event in the one is

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accompanied by a corresponding event in the other, not because one such event causes or is the effect of the other—to assert this would be to imply that body and mind interacted, that is had effects upon one another—but because of the goodness of God, who, in order that we may survive and live, arranges for each event in the body to be the occasion (note the word "occasion" which is deliberately used and not the word "cause") of the appropriate event in the mind and *vice versa*. Thus, let us suppose that I come down hungry to breakfast. In order to appease my feeling of hunger I must eat; that is to say, my body must perform certain actions, and this precisely is what my body proceeds to do. An observer would see my two hands outstretched and the fingers closing on the handles of knife and fork. He would then note how the knife and fork are brought to within striking distance of a sausage which is lying on my plate. Impelled by my fingers the fork pierces the sausage and the knife cuts off about half an inch. This, impaled upon the fork, is lifted by arm and fingers in the direction of my face. As it approaches my face, a small hole opens in the bottom of the face, the impaled portion of sausage disappears within it and the hole closes again. A number of other bodily events connected with the sausage—mastication, salivation, assimilation, digestion and, it may be evacuation—ensue. But we will not follow the further adventures of the sausage.

Now to say that my feeling of hunger which is a mental event *caused* all these bodily happenings will not do, for to invoke the notion of cause would be to imply interaction. Accordingly Descartes substitutes for the relation of *causing*, the beneficent intervention of God. God, in short, intervenes to

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ensure that my body will take the appropriate steps to satisfy the desires of my mind and *vice versa*. Thus each mental event is treated by God as the occasion for the occurrence of the appropriate bodily event and *vice versa*.

This alleged solution of the problem was objected to on the ground that even if we admitted the existence of a creative and benevolent God, the theory postulated His continuous intervention at every moment in the life of every living creature which seemed—to say the least of it—rather a wasteful use to make of God. The philosopher, Leibniz, who believed himself to have established the existence of God by a number of valid proofs, put forward a revised proposal which had the advantage of greater economy of hypothesis. His view was that mind and body marched together in harmony, so that every event in the one was accompanied by a corresponding and appropriate event in the other, because they had been originally wound up, as it were, and set together by the Creator. The words “wound up” and “set” were deliberately employed to suggest clock-work, and Leibniz invoked the simile of two clocks. Let us suppose, he said, that there are two clocks which were wound and set together and keep perfect time. Then every tick of the one clock would be accompanied by a corresponding tick of the other, not because the ticking of the one *caused* the ticking of the other, but because of the perfect synchronisation between them. It was on these lines that he sought to explain the apparent interaction between mind and body. God originally wound them up and set them together in order that they might work together harmoniously to fulfil His purpose in creating them.

Arguments of this kind are apt to be unconvincing

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to scientists. (a) Most of them see no reason to believe in the existence of a creative God. Where, they ask, is the evidence? (b) Even if there were such a being, His intervention in order to secure the synchronisation of body and mind is unobservable and the notion of it is, therefore, unscientific. The same is true of His alleged initial winding up and setting together of body and mind. (c) Many would add that, even if He exists and does interfere in human affairs, there is no reason to think that His interferences are beneficent or even that He wishes us well. Look, they would say, at the amount of evil that there is in the world. Can we not, then, the scientists urged, find some methods of dealing with the problem that takes it out of the realm of the supernatural?

### MACHINERY OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Let us return for a moment to the machinery of the nervous system. In the sketch given above we followed the passage of a nervous impulse from some sense organ along the receptor nervous system to the brain. Now let us suppose that the receiver proceeds to take action in regard to the impulse or, rather, with regard to the stimulus that originated it. Suppose, for example, that I inadvertently touch a red hot poker and, feeling the pain of a burn, I withdraw my hand as quickly as I can. What has the science of physiology to tell us of the machinery involved in withdrawing the fingers which, after all, is a particular form of "taking action" in regard to the stimulus?

The stimulus, which has been transferred to the brain by means of the receptor nervous system, is, we are told, now transferred to another system of neurones, known as the effector or motor nervous

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system, which govern the movements we make as opposed to the receptor or sensory nervous system which receives and transmits the sensations we feel. The stimulus, having been transferred to the motor nervous system from the brain, is passed on in the form of a neural message to the neck, arms, wrist, hand and fingers, as the result of which the latter are withdrawn from the poker.

The whole procedure may be likened to sending a message from the fingers to the brain in response to which another message is sent back to the fingers. Now the processes involved in the sending of these messages, complicated as they appear, seem, nevertheless, when we look at them from the point of view of the body, to be purely automatic. It is like putting a penny in a slot machine and taking out a box of matches.

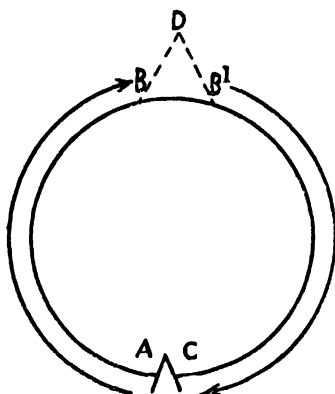
Nor does it appear to be necessary to introduce a mind or consciousness at any stage of the process to explain what it is that happens or why it happens. It may be true that we *feel* the heat of the poker, and that the feeling is a psychological or mental, as opposed to a physiological or bodily event; but it may also be true that the feeling has nothing to do with the withdrawal of the fingers, which is a purely automatic result of the applied stimulus.

I have deliberately taken the simplest possible case, and one in which the action of the body is, on any view of the mind-body relationship, as nearly automatic as it is possible for it to be. But if we can explain some of our actions, however simple they may be, without introducing the intervention of this mysterious thing mind, may it not be possible that *the same sort of explanation*, enormously complicated, of course, but still confining itself purely

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to bodily terms, might be invoked to account for all our actions? In any event, should we not, say the materialists, in the interests of science leave no stone unturned in order to make it do so, hoping that an increase in knowledge about the body will cause the gradual disappearance of many difficulties which at present beset the attempt to explain, not only action but thought in bodily terms?

Let me try to put the point diagrammatically.



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Let us suppose that in the above diagram ABB'C is a circle which roughly represents the passage of a stimulus or impulse round the nervous system. The stimulus is applied to A (the fingers), and passes into the brain at B. I have marked off a segment of the circle from B to B' to indicate the fact that there is a definite passage through the brain, the point at which the impulse leaves the brain at B' being different from that at which it enters at B. This is a passage through exceedingly complicated tiers of nerve cells which apply a process of sifting or sorting to the impulses received, with a view to determining which of them shall be passed on to the motor nervous system for action. The part of the circle from B' to C represents the motor or effector nervous system, C being again the fingers, or in other words the point at which the motor impulse travelling from B' to C causes us, as we say, to take action by withdrawing them.

### THE MATERIALIST CONCLUSION

In the light of these facts, the materialist proceeds to argue as follows: the passage of an impulse round the nervous system, a passage which can be completely described at every stage in physiological terms, is sufficient in itself to explain what happens whenever the organism feels and acts. Thus we may think of bodily actions on the analogy of the movements of water in a full reservoir. One pipe leads into the reservoir, another out of it; whenever, therefore, fresh water comes in through the first pipe, it will cause an overflow of water which will be drained off through the second. The process is a purely automatic one and takes place in accordance with physical laws. Whenever, in other words, a stimulus is applied at one end of the

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chain, then the appropriate reaction will occur at the other.

If it is not, then we must assume that this nervous chain is broken; that when the impulse reaches B it leaves the brain altogether and passes out of the circle into something of an entirely different nature from B, which we will call D, the mind. How this occurs we do not know; but, if it does, the result will be, first, that we shall, as we say, be aware of or feel the stimulus; secondly, that this awareness or feeling will be a purely mental event not explicable in bodily terms; and thirdly, that having experienced it, the mind may or may not decide to give effect to the stimulus by instructing the brain to set the nervous system to work to remove the fingers. The nervous system will in the former event begin to work again—indeed, it *must* operate if action is to follow—but it will come into operation after a break, during which the body has ceased to function and something which is not the body has taken charge, the nervous system coming into action again only after an instruction has been received from this bodily something.

But if the body ceases to function and something which is not bodily at all, but which is called a mind, takes charge, we are back on the unexplained mystery of how body and mind can interact. And the notion that a mystery occurs is something which, as we have seen, science must at all costs reject. In all the circumstances, the materialists argue, it is better to dispense with the notion of a mind altogether, if by a mind is meant an activity that can think freely, will freely and interfere freely with the action of the body, introducing arbitrary interruptions in the normal sequence of cause and effect. Their view is, then, that "mind," to give it what,



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if they are right, is only a courtesy title, is either part of the body or is a sort of off-shoot or emanation from the body. Its thoughts, feelings and emotions and so on are wholly caused by the body and never themselves cause anything in the body.

There are, broadly, two alternatives here, a more extreme and a less. On the more extreme view the mind is thought of after the model of a highly attenuated material substance surrounding the brain rather like the halo round the head of a saint, or, as a nineteenth century scientist put it, like the phosphorescent glow which can be seen to surround a decayed lobster in the dark. Consciousness is thought of as a sort of glow whose function is confined to lighting up the events which occur in the brain. These events, so far at any rate as our contact with the external world is concerned, occur as the result of the workings of the machinery of the nervous system at which I have briefly glanced. When the glow lights them up—and it is by no means clear that it always does so—then our minds are said to be conscious of the events, our consciousness taking the form of thoughts, desires, sensations, feelings and so on.

Now it is obvious that the glow of consciousness cannot light up what isn't there. Hence nothing can occur in the mind unless it has first occurred in the brain. All so-called mind events are dependent upon the bodily events which cause them, and mind, instead of being an arbitrary interfering agent, is itself brought within the scheme of physical causation which operates everywhere else in the universe. As the great Victorian scientist, T. H. Huxley, put it, "The thoughts to which I am now giving utterance and your thoughts regarding them are the expression of molecular changes in the matter of life," that

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is to say, in the case in question, in the matter of my brain and of yours.

According to the less extreme view, mind is conceived as an entity or activity—call it what you will—which is other than the body and is not, therefore, material. Nevertheless, though other than the body, it is wholly dependent *on* the body, being described sometimes as what is called a function of the body, sometimes as a spectator of the events which are going on in the body. A mind so conceived is technically called an “epiphenomenal” mind, the word “epiphenomenal” being used to denote something that *supervenes* upon the body.

On this view, there are mental happenings, thoughts, feelings, and so on, which are genuinely mental and which may even be the cause of other mental happenings. But (1) if we trace back the chain of causation far enough, we shall find that they are caused in the last resort by some bodily happening of which the mind was a spectator; (2) their function is confined to registering those bodily happenings of which the mind is a spectator; (3) they don't interfere with the body or cause bodily happenings. Like the more extreme view, this less extreme view has the advantage of bringing mental events within the general scheme of physical causation which operates elsewhere throughout the universe.

### BEHAVIOURISM

Both views are connected with a well-known theory of modern psychology, called Behaviourism. Behaviourism doesn't so much deny the existence of a mind as assert that if there is one, we cannot know anything about it. Why not? Because a

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mind isn't something that can be observed. All that we can observe is what people's bodies do, is, in fact, bodily behaviour. Now speech is one of the things that people's bodies do, since it consists of noises which they make in their larynxes. Speech, then, is a form of bodily behaviour. As for the thoughts that lie behind and express themselves in the words used, these, since they cannot be observed, are either denied or else are identified with something that can at any rate in theory be observed, namely, the small incipient speech movements that not only go on in our throats when we speak, but which also go on when we think but don't express our thoughts in words. Thinking, then, is described as sub-vocal talking. This view has once again the effect of dispensing with the notion of the mind, in so far as a mind is conceived of as something that has a life and being of its own, independent of that of the body, and which can on occasion interfere with and cause bodily activities. Now, if all the events that occur in what we call our minds are either of the same kind as bodily events or are at least completely caused by bodily events, there is nothing in the universe which lies outside the universal scheme of physical causation which science investigates, the scheme within which observations occur, calculations are made, laws are formulated on the basis of the events observed and calculated and future events predicted in terms of the operation of the laws.

## MATERIALIST BIOLOGY

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of great scientific advance and discovery, notably in the sciences of biology, geology and astronomy. This is not a book about science. Our concern is with the deductions in regard to the nature

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of the universe as a whole which men have drawn from the discoveries of science, deductions which, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, have been mainly materialist. Let us then, glance at the findings\* of biology.

I have not the knowledge to trace the steps by which biologists reached their conclusions. I can only briefly outline those which are relevant. First and foremost the theory of evolution was thought to show that human life and, therefore, the human mind, instead of being, as most people had previously believed, a special creation by God, occurring a few thousand years ago (4,000 odd B.C. was the popularly accepted date) had slowly and gradually evolved out of non-human forms of life over a period of some millions of years. Moreover, other forms of life had preceded human life by millions of years. (One estimate widely accepted to-day puts the past of life as a whole at about a thousand million years and the past of human life at about a million.) The evidence for this view is mainly founded on what is called the record of the rocks. Geologists have been able to compile a diagram of the different kinds of rocks composing the earth's surface, a diagram which roughly indicates their age and also, as layer piles on top of layer, the chronological order of the different layers.

Now the rocks contain fossils, that is, the ossified remains of the skeletons of living creatures. As their observation passes upward from the bottom layers to those nearer the top, as, that is to say, layer succeeds layer in point of time, geologists have been able to note the fossilised remains of one sort of creature being transformed by slow degrees into the fossilised remains of another. More technically, the remains of one species can be seen to evolve into those

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of another through a series of intermediate forms. From the evidence of these fossilised remains, biologists believe that we ourselves have evolved from earlier types of man by slow insensible gradations, these earlier types of man having themselves evolved from creatures like apes or, more precisely, from an intermediate lemur-like creature who was apparently the ancestor both of ourselves and of the apes.

What is more, biology purports to show in a general way how this evolution of one species into another took place; that is to say, it establishes the laws by which the process was governed. These are summed up in the law of natural selection resulting in what is called "the survival of the fittest." If all offspring exactly resembled their parents, the earth would still be populated by those kinds of living creatures who inhabited it when life first appeared upon the planet, mainly marine creatures of the jelly-fish and amœba type. Thus, short of a number of special creations by the Almighty, which is the last thing in which materialists were prepared to believe, it was only in so far as children varied, however slightly, from their parents that evolution could begin to occur. Now such variations do, in fact, take place and, it is obvious, they will be of one or other of two kinds. They will either take the form of greater strength, greater cunning, greater swiftness, greater agility, or they will involve a smaller endowment of these desirable qualities.

Variations of the first type will confer an advantage in the struggle for existence, enabling their possessors to obtain more food, escape more dangers and so on. Variations of the second type will be at a disadvantage. Hence, granted keen competition

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for the available food supply, variations of the second type will tend to be eliminated and the creatures which exhibited them not to survive, so that *that* will be the end of the variation.

Variations, then, were of enormous importance. They provided the raw material, as it were, upon which the evolutionary laws of natural selection and the struggle for survival operated, the process of natural selection performing the function of a sieve which let through only those variations which were biologically advantageous. Creatures exhibiting these latter chose mates who were endowed with a similar variation which was in due course bequeathed to their offspring. Thus with luck the variation would gradually become established in the species, becoming more marked from generation to generation until what was in effect a new species had branched off from the old. Variations, then, were the stuff of evolution, the necessary raw material for that whole process which, beginning with the amoeba, had culminated in ourselves.

### THE CAUSE OF VARIATIONS

Why, then—and here we come to the crucial question, the answer to which formed the starting point of the materialist view—are there variations? Broadly, there were two answers in the field. (I am still summarising nineteenth century thought, though the picture is not in essence different to-day.) Either they occurred by chance or they were due to the influence of changes in the external environment. The first answer was, in effect, that of the great naturalist, Charles Darwin. He thought of variations as initially very small and gradually becoming more marked as generation succeeded generation; but as to why they occurred he had no theory to offer. They just did. The other answer

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was that of the French naturalist, Lamarck. It drew attention to the great changes that occurred from time to time in the earth's climate. Ice ages advanced and receded; fertile soil became eroded and turned into desert; as the direction of the prevailing winds and the quantity of rainfall changed, jungle would give place to steppe and so on.

\* A species living in an environment subject to such changes would either succeed in adapting itself to them or it would not. On the first alternative, the variation which resulted from the successful adaptation would enable the creature which possessed it to survive and prosper and hand on the variation to its offspring through a similarly varying-mate. On the second, the species would be snuffed out.

To put the theory picturesquely, let us suppose that the Sahara desert, instead of being one of the driest areas on the earth's surface, became one of the rainiest; then you would expect camels, let us say, to be born with the rudiments of umbrellas. If they weren't, there would be no more camels.

The difference between the two views came out vividly in a controversy which was current at the time, as to why the giraffe grew his long neck. Giraffes feed on the leaves of trees. Suppose an environment in which, owing to the increasing numbers of giraffes, most of the leaves within reach on the trees in a particular area are nibbled off. It is obvious that those giraffes will survive and prosper which can reach higher up on the tree than the average. On the Darwinian view, young giraffes are born who vary by chance in respect of their possession of longer necks than the average. These survive, produce long-necked offspring and the characteristic of long-neckedness in giraffes gradually

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becomes established. On Lamarck's view, we are asked to think of the environment as one which changes in respect of the fact that the available food supply is found at ever higher levels. Either a giraffe adapted himself to this change by growing a longer neck, or he didn't. If he did, he survived and prospered and handed on the characteristic of long-neckedness to his offspring. If not, he disappeared.

But the difference between the two views was unimportant compared with the likeness. And this, the likeness, was remarkable not so much for what it asserted as for what it left out. What was at issue was nothing less than the question of the cause of the evolutionary process. How was it, in other words, that our planet came to be peopled with the kind of creatures who are now to be found upon it? In answering this question the two views invoke no *mental* conceptions of any kind. Here is no God creating the world and putting living creatures into it. Here is no mind expressing itself in acts of will, furthering some purpose or pursuing a design. Here is not even a blind creative urge. Here are only, if we accept Darwin's view, variations occurring by chance and, if we accept Lamarck's, the influence of an external environment conceived in purely physical terms. Now these factors, chance and the purely physical factors of climate and natural environment, had determined events upon the planet before man had appeared upon the scene. Hence the development of life in general and of human life in particular was ascribed to the continued operation of the same influences as had prevailed before life had appeared. It followed that there was nothing unique about life, nothing unique,



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even, about human life. Life was the product of sun and rain and wind and frost working on the raw materials of which the planet was composed.

## CONCLUSION

### THE MATERIALIST SCHEME OF THE UNIVERSE

Now let us put together the conclusions of the nineteenth century psychology and the nineteenth century biology at which we have so briefly glanced. The biology concerns itself with the conditions prevailing in the environment of living creatures to which they respond, and its teaching is that changes in the bodies of living creatures are due to the effects upon them of changes in this external environment. When these changes in the bodies of living creatures have been transmitted from generation to generation over a sufficiently long period, the species to which they belong gradually becomes altered and is, in fact, transformed into what biologists recognise as a different species.

The psychology is concerned with what goes on inside living creatures. The view favoured by materialists maintains that everything that happens in the mind is caused by something that has first happened in the brain. What happens in the brain is the result of what has first happened in the body, since bodily events cause and determine brain events by means of the messages which travel to the brain along the receptor nervous system, and which bring the news of the bodily events which the brain proceeds to register. And these bodily events? These, as we have seen, are due to the stimuli reaching the body from its external environment through the sense organs and the skin stimuli

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which the body proceeds, as it were, to register and to which it responds.

Thus, the chain of causation is complete from the events in the purely physical external environment due to the effects of sun, rain, wind and frost, due in short, to all the factors that go to make up what we call the climate, to the thoughts of a mind. In the last resort, it is to changes in this environment that the most elaborately refined speculations of the most highly developed mind are the reactions. At every stage in this process of causation and through all the many intermediate links of the chain, what is less living determines what is more living, what is more material determines what is less, climatic changes determining the nature of the physical environment of mountain, desert, sea, plain, jungle, trees and animals, the physical environment determining the bodies of those creatures who live in it, the bodies determining what happens in brains, and the brains determining what happens in minds. This, then, in the last resort is what materialism means; not that everything is made of matter, but that, if you trace back the causation of any thought or feeling however developed the mind or however elevated the spirit in which it occurs, you will ultimately come upon some material happening which originates the series of events of which it is the end product.

What is true of events in the human mind and spirit, is true throughout the universe as a whole. Matter, then, is fundamental and basic in the universe and mind is a mere off-shoot or outgrowth from it, the product of certain rather physical conditions which, when the conditions which produced it no longer obtain, will disappear.

This general view of the status of mind in the universe which was mainly founded upon biology

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and psychology, was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reinforced by all the contemporary sciences. Geology had enormously extended the age of the earth; astronomy, the size and spread of space. It was known that the earth had existed for hundreds of millions of years before any life appeared upon it, and that there had been life upon the earth for about a thousand million years before human life appeared. Human life, on an estimate which gives to all doubtful types intermediate between ape and man the benefit of the doubt and treats them as human, has existed for under a million. Astronomy had shown that space was enormous in extent, that it contains many thousands of millions of stars like our sun, and that some of them are surrounded by planetary systems like that which includes the earth. Nevertheless, nowhere else in the vast immensities of geological time and astronomical space was life actually *known* to exist. In fact, it was thought at that time\* that the physical conditions suitable to life, as we know it, were of extremely rare occurrence.

The universe, in fact, if it was designed at all—and according to at least one of the arguments which I have outlined in this chapter there was no reason to suppose that it had been designed\*\*—did not seem to have been designed for the reception of life. Life, in fact, was an accident, a brief interlude in the history of an insignificant planet which was rotating about one of the stars in the Milky Way. It was like a chance passenger travelling across a fundamentally alien and hostile environment. So long as

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\* Though not now; see, for example, Mr. Hoyle's talks on the radio now re-published in a book, *The Nature of the Universe*.

\*\* See page 128 above.

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life endured, everything that was living, and every event in the minds of living creatures was caused by prior events in pieces of matter. But life would not endure indefinitely. Once the earth was too hot and too moist to maintain life; a time would come—so it was thought—when the heat of the sun had sufficiently cooled, when it would be too cold and too dry.\*

As that time approaches, life will be gradually eliminated from that one corner of the universe that has known it and the earth will continue to spin through space for millions of years with the remains of the human race, its palaces, its roads, its factories, its cathedrals, its skyscrapers, its books and its pictures, frozen to its icy surface.

Such, briefly, is the picture of the universe and of the status and destiny of human life within it which Materialism paints. It is not optimistic in its view as regards the progress of man which, indeed, it conceives as a progress to extinction. But who, it may be asked, are we, if the universe is indeed mindless and lacking both in point and purpose, that *we* should expect it to fulfil our hopes and conform to our wishes?

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\* It now seems more likely (see Mr. Hoyle's talks) that the sun will ultimately explode and that the earth will be roasted.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THAT EVERYTHING IS MIND

#### STRANGENESS OF IDEALISM

IN THE last chapter I introduced the problem of the relation of the mind to the body. Assuming mind and body to be as radically different as they appear to be, how, I asked, are we to explain the fact of their apparent interaction? To many philosophers this problem has seemed so insoluble that they have felt themselves driven to deny the radical difference. Either, they have said in effect, mind is at bottom of the same nature as matter being, in fact, an offshoot from or by-product of matter; or matter is an illusion and mind is the only reality. The first of these alternatives was considered in the last chapter; it remains to consider the second. Before I come to it, let me make three preliminary points.

First, to those who are meeting it for the first time, the view that everything is mind is apt to seem so incredible that they are often inclined to dismiss it as nonsense. Thus, the great Dr. Johnson, when asked by Boswell how he refuted Berkeley's theory that matter does not exist, "answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus.' " Many, perhaps most people, are inclined when they first meet this view to dismiss it with a similar contempt. Nevertheless, when they think about it for the

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*second* time, people are apt to be much more impressed and some, at least, are convinced.

For, secondly, the view that everything that exists or—to put it in a less extreme form—everything that can be *known* is in some sense mental, which is one of the many forms assumed by the philosophy of Idealism, is one that the majority of philosophers have held in some form or other, and is exceedingly difficult to refute.

Thirdly, if you do reject it and are at the same time unconvinced by the Materialism described in the last chapter, you are brought up against the difficulty which both Materialism and Idealism successfully avoid, the difficulty of explaining how two totally different substances, namely mind and matter, manage to interact.

### BERKELEY'S ARGUMENTS

The philosophical view known as Idealism appears in the works of many philosophers, but in England it was most distinctively and plausibly maintained by the eighteenth century philosopher, Bishop Berkeley, who adduced many striking arguments in its favour. I will state some of these arguments in my own way, reducing them to three.

First, whatever we can know about a thing's qualities is dependent upon, because it varies with, the nature of the mind that knows it. Secondly, a thing is nothing but the qualities which we perceive it to have, or rather, if there is anything else to it, we cannot know what that something else is. Now, thirdly, there seems to be no very good reason why what we don't know should be quite different in its nature from what we do know, so that while the former is always and invariably mental, the latter is not. I will take these three points in turn.

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### THAT QUALITIES ARE MENTAL OR MIND DEPENDENT

1. First let us run through some of the qualities which are normally supposed to belong to physical things. Take, for example, colour. If I and a colour-blind man both look at a so-called blue flower, I shall see it blue while he will see it grey. Now it cannot be both blue and grey at the same time, and there seems to be no way of determining which of us is seeing it as it *really* is. Certainly, I cannot make such a claim on behalf of myself merely because I happen to see the colour as the majority does. Moreover, how do I know that I *am* in the majority? What about the way in which dogs see it, or earwigs? Again, if I see it in a different light or by artificial light, it will seem to have a different colour; if I look at it when I have jaundice or when somebody has squeezed a drug called Santonin into my eyes, it will look yellow. There seem to be no grounds in short for saying that I in normal English daylight see the colour which the flower really has, while the colour-blind man sees a colour which it doesn't really have. What, then, is its real colour? There seems to be no way of answering this question. Perhaps the most plausible thing to say is that it hasn't got a real colour at all, but that the colour it appears to have is dependent on the state of the viewer's mind, brain and sense organs. As Bishop Berkeley puts it, it is an idea in the viewer's mind.

Or take size. If I look at a thing through the naked eye, it appears to have one size; if through a microscope, another; if through a telescope, another. What, then, is its real size? Again if I look at a church steeple from a number of different distances it will appear to have a different height from each of them, one when I look at it from half a mile

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off, another from a hundred yards, another from six inches and so on. Bishop Berkeley gives a good illustration of this point. "Think you," says one of the speakers in one of his Dialogues, "the senses were bestowed upon all animals for their preservation and well-being in life? Or were they given to men alone for this end?" "I make no question," the other speaker answers, "but they have the same use in all animals." "If so, is it not necessary they should be enabled by them to perceive their own limbs and those bodies which are capable of harming them?" "Certainly." "A mite, therefore, must be supposed to see his own foot, and things equal or even less than it as bodies of some considerable dimension; though at the same time they appear to you scarce discernible, or at best as so many visible points?" "I cannot deny it." "And to creatures less than the mite they will seem yet larger?" "They will." "Insomuch that what you can hardly discern, will to another extremely minute animal appear as some huge mountain?" "All this I grant."

The speaker then goes on to point out that a thing cannot at one and the same time be of two different sizes, the inference being that it has no *real* size at all, but only a number of apparent sizes which differ according to the nature of the person who or organism which views the thing.

Or take heat. Heat, we think, is a property of things; the fire, we say as we sit by it, is hot. But, says Berkeley, if you gradually bring your chair nearer and nearer to the fire the feeling of heat gradually intensifies, until it becomes a feeling of pain. Now nobody supposes that the pain is in the fire; the pain is in us; yet the pain is only a more intense degree of the heat which has gradually



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deepened into pain. The inference is that the heat also was in us, and that the most we can attribute to the fire is some power (which is not heat) of causing a feeling of heat in a living organism possessing an appropriate temperature. (I put in this last point because salamanders were said not to feel heat at all). Similarly, water which seems cool to one hand which has just been in very hot water, will seem hot to another which has just been in cold water.

Or take shape. We normally say that the shape of a penny is round, but from most points of view from which it is looked at a penny is not round but oval, being, in fact, as you find out when you first learn to draw, an ellipse, the shape of the various ellipses which the penny exhibits varying in respect of fatness and thinness according to the point of view from which the penny is looked at. Put the penny on the table and look at it from a point which is just above the table's edge, and the ellipse will elongate itself into a mere rim. Only from two points of view, namely, that which is perpendicularly below the penny and that which is perpendicularly above it, does it look circular, and these points of view are but rarely occupied by human eyes. Why, then, do we say that the penny is circular? Perhaps because its shape is such as is exactly described by a pair of compasses or because, when they are measured by a ruler, all the lines running from its centre to the circumference are found to be equal. But this, surely, won't do. The question at issue is whether there is a real material penny with a real circular shape. Now we obviously can't settle such a question by assuming that there is a real material pair of compasses and a real material ruler possessing fixed and stable qualities in their own right. If the shape of

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the penny is suspect, so is the shape and so are the qualities of the compasses and the ruler. Or we may say that it is because the shape of a penny conforms to some mathematical definition of a circle; that its circumference is  $2\pi r$  and its area  $\pi r^2$ . But these, after all, are only mathematical expressions which are used to describe different aspects of a circular shape and the question is whether this is, in fact, the shape that the penny has. To say, for example, that its area equals  $\pi r^2$  doesn't really help, as will be seen if we ask three questions. First, what is the area of a circle? Answer,  $\pi r^2$ . Second question, what is  $\pi r^2$ ? Answer, an expression which is used to describe the area of objects which have circular shapes. Third question, is this, then, the shape of the penny? Answer, that unfortunately is precisely the question in dispute. It is, I am afraid, the argument and not the penny which is circular, so that we are, I think, forced to the conclusion that there are *no* good grounds for calling the area of the penny, as it appears, circular.

Or take texture. The surface of a stocking appears smooth, but if it is examined under a microscope it displays hundreds of wrinkles and holes and hillocks and ridges. Those who have read *Gulliver's Travels* will remember the dismay with which in the second satire he contemplates the skins of the famous beauties of Brobdignag. To their lovers they appeared smooth as silk, soft as down, but to Gulliver's worm's-eye view they appeared to be as much pitted with holes and craters as if they were the surface of the moon, while the soft, downy hairs on the upper lips of these beauties seemed coarse growths of the size of young saplings. Further than that, we know that to the eye of the chemist and still more of the physicists examining the roughest or the

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smoothest of surfaces with a high-powered microscope, it appears as a swarm of moving molecules.

### BERKELEY'S CONCLUSION

Examples could be multiplied indefinitely; all of them point to the same conclusion, which is, that the qualities which things appear to have do not belong to them in their own right independently of the observer. Without somebody to observe it the water would not be hot, the pillar box red, the steeple high, the skin soft or the penny round. The inference is that the qualities of heat, colour, height, texture and shape are all in some way contributed by the observer, and are not, therefore, as they seem to be, qualities of matter, but projections of mind, or as Berkeley puts it, ideas in the mind of the perceiver. You can test the conclusion by experiment. Suppose that you press your fingers against the table. What is it that you are directly aware of? The table top? At first sight, the answer would seem to be "yes," but if you think again you will, I think, agree that the true answer is that you are aware of a feeling of coolness and pressure in your fingers. Suppose you put an apple in your mouth and bite a piece out of it and again ask the question, what are you aware of? At first sight, again, the answer is, the apple; but when you think about the matter more closely, you realise that what you are aware of is a taste, a taste of sweetness or sourness as the case may be, due, as the physiologists tell us, to the stimulation of the taste buds in the mouth by the juice of the apple. It is not of outside things, then, but of feelings and sensations in yourself which you assume to be *caused by* outside things that you are aware of, when you make contact with what you call the outside world.

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And the nature of the feelings, the qualities of the sensations obviously varies with and depends upon the conditions prevailing in you. Suppose, for example, that you have a bad cold. Then you will lose, as we say, your sense of smell. Suppose you are astigmatical or myopic, then things will have a different visual appearance to you from what they would have had if your vision had been normal and from what they do, in fact, have to a person of normal vision. Suppose that you have a high temperature; then the world will both look and feel differently from what it does when your temperature is normal. Recall, for example, how the sheets felt as you lay in bed with a temperature; you were much more keenly aware of their texture than you are at ordinary times, much more sensitive to little roughnesses and protuberances, and so on. The first point, then, that Berkeley seeks to establish is that the qualities of the outside world, as we experience them, turn out to vary with and to be dependent upon ourselves; To be, in fact, nothing more or less than sensations and feelings (he calls them "ideas") in our own minds. If so, it is obvious that they don't exist out there in the world as qualities of matter.

### THE " OBJECT " THAT CAUSES THE SENSATIONS

2. But, you will say—and this brings me to my second point—there must be something out there in the world to cause the sensations and feelings that we have when, as we say, we come into contact with it. This statement may mean one or both of two things.

The first is that there must be *something* " out there " to cause our sensations; if the heat isn't in the fire, there must be some power in the fire to

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make us feel hot; if the taste isn't in the apple, there must be some power in the apple to make us experience a taste of sweetness or sourness, and so on.

But even if there were such a "something," we could not know it. Let me put the point as follows:—

The position that this suggestion asks us to accept is that, when we perceive an object in the outside world, three things are involved. First (A), the object out there; secondly (B), the sensations and feelings (what Berkeley calls "ideas") in us that we experience; thirdly (C), our minds which experience the sensations of hot, cold, sweet, sour, rough, smooth, and so on. Now what we are asked to believe is that A is the cause of B, but that what C, the mind, knows is always B and never A. But if this is so, then C, the mind, cannot know anything about A; it cannot know that it exists and it cannot know that it has the power of being able to cause B. We could only know these things, if we knew A directly, that is to say, independently of B and that, according to the theory, is just what we don't and can't do. The statement, therefore, that there must be something out there in the world to cause our feelings and sensations doesn't really help us.

The second thing that the statement may mean is that there must be something—matter, force, call it what you will—underlying the qualities to hold them together.

### THE SUBSTANCE THAT UNITES THE QUALITIES

This raises what is known in philosophy as the problem of substance which will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.\* Briefly, however,

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\* See Chapter Eight, pages 160, 161.

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the problem is this : if you take away all the qualities that a thing possesses, and then ask yourself what is left, the answer is " nothing at all." Or, more precisely, if something *were* to be left, we could not know it, for we only know a thing in terms of the qualities that it exhibits and something which has no qualities is not only unknowable but unthinkable. This, indeed, is one of the points on which Berkeley is most emphatic; brute matter, he says in effect, is something which is never experienced for, however hard we may try to experience matter, what we do in fact experience are qualities, never the matter behind them which we normally say has the qualities. What is more, brute matter, that is to say, matter without qualities, is something that cannot be thought of. Berkeley is right. Try to think of something that is neither hot nor cold, red nor yellow, large nor small, rough nor smooth, sweet nor bitter, angular nor circular, nor indeed, anything between these various pairs of opposites; you cannot do it. A thing must have qualities, if it is to be thought about at all; still more, if it is to be experienced. It would appear, then, that apart from its qualities a thing is nothing. But if the qualities turn out to be mental in the sense of being mind-dependent, and if there is nothing behind them, nothing in addition to them, then there is nothing in the universe which is not mental or, at any rate, mind-dependent.

This general conclusion is put by Berkeley in one of the most famous sentences in philosophy : " Some truths there are so near and obvious that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, viz. that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth; in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty

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frame of the world have not any substance without a mind—that their *being* is to be *perceived* or *known*."

### IS THERE UNKNOWABLE MATTER?

3. To turn to my third point, this has already by implication been covered. It may, of course, be the case that something exists in the world which we don't know and that this something is quite different in its nature from all the things that we do know, so that while *they* turn out on examination to be mental, this unknown thing is material or is like what we take matter to be; for, if Berkeley is right, we have never experienced matter.

As to this, in the first place, it would be an odd circumstance if, while all the things that we do know turn out to be mental, there should be something else, *thi*, something else being quite different from everything that we do know, being in fact, material. It might, of course, be the case that the universe is arranged like that, but it would surely be very odd if it were.

But can it be the case? If Berkeley is right, it cannot, since, as we have seen, the existence of matter without qualities is unthinkable and qualities are mental. Thus, if anything does exist in the world which minds don't know, it cannot be material or like what we take matter to be. But, once again, if Berkeley is right, nothing *could* exist that mind doesn't know, for, as we have also seen, to exist is, for him, to exist in and for a mind.

### INTRODUCTION OF GOD'S MIND

One question often raised in connection with Berkeley's philosophy is this. If things only exist in so far as minds know them, if, as he insists, to

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exist is to exist in a mind, what happens to them when minds cease to know them? What happens, in fact, to my room when I go out of it? Does it go out of existence and then come into existence again when I come back and again perceive it? Berkeley maintains that this is not the case, since he holds that, although the existence of things is dependent on mind, it doesn't, therefore, follow that it is dependent on *our* minds. There is also, he urged, the mind of God. Now God perceives things all the time; therefore, when we cease to perceive them, they don't cease to exist but remain in existence by reason of the fact that God knows them. Things exist, therefore, all the time whether we perceive them or not, as ideas in God's mind. When *we* know them, it is because he puts these ideas into our minds too. Thus Berkeley succeeds in consistently maintaining that the existence of things is mental, or, rather, that only minds and their ideas exist, without being driven to the absurdity of maintaining that the world of things ceases to exist whenever we cease to perceive it.

The arguments in favour of Idealism are very strong and, as I said at the beginning, it is a view which in one form or another—and there are many forms of it—has been embraced by the majority of philosophers. This doesn't mean, however, that the view is incapable of being criticised or even, as some would hold, of being refuted. The arguments which can be brought against it are, however, technical, and I shall not here attempt to follow them.

### THE PROBLEM THAT REMAINS

If we opt neither for materialism nor for idealism, we shall still presumably have left upon our hands



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the problem of the interaction between the two different substances, mind and matter, and this, if I am right, we don't know how to solve.

But philosophy, as I said in the Introduction, seeks to understand the universe as a whole, and that, it is obvious, is a very big undertaking, for the universe as a whole is a mystery. Hence it is not to be expected of philosophy that it should *solve* its problems. (When, as has sometimes happened in the past, some solution of a philosophical problem has definitely been established, the subject in question ceases to belong to philosophy and goes off, as it were, to join one of the special sciences, physics, astronomy or psychology, and becomes a subject in its own right.) The most that philosophy can hope to do is to put the various problems, as it were, in perspective and to indicate the alternative views which it is possible to take in regard to them. Which, if any, among those views you choose depends upon your general temperament and outlook; unless, indeed, you turn out to be an original thinker, in which case you will form views for yourself.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PLATO'S THEORY OF IDEAS

HAVING CONSIDERED the two extreme views that the universe consists wholly of matter and that it consists wholly of mind, I propose in this last chapter to say something about Plato's general theory of the universe. I have chosen this from among a number of metaphysical\* theories for three reasons. First, because it affords an example of that distinction between the world as it appears and the world as it really is, of which I spoke in the introduction to Part II.\*\* Secondly, because it links with and affords a basis for the theory of conduct which, it will be remembered, sought to establish those things which are worth while in and for themselves, described in Chapter V. Thirdly, because, in my view, Plato is the greatest of the philosophers and the account which he gave seems to me to be more likely to be true than any other with which I am acquainted. Incidentally, this account constitutes the nearest approach that philosophers, by the unaided light of their own reason, have made to the Christian conception of what the world is like which, to my mind, is the true one.

#### PLATO'S CRITICISM OF THE FAMILIAR WORLD

Plato makes a number of points in regard to

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\* See page 109 above for an account of the sense in which this word is used.

\*\* See pages 109—114 above.

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the everyday world of things and people moving about in space and changing in time, which are designed to show that they can't be wholly and ultimately real.

First, the qualities possessed by such things don't, as it were, exist in their own right but are always relative to the qualities of other things. Consider, for example, a rabbit. Is it a large animal or a small one? The answer is, small relatively to an elephant, large relatively to a mouse. In fact, it is both large and small—both or neither according to the way in which you like to look at it. Suppose that having just come in from a blizzard I put my hands in tepid water; the water will seem hot; if I have just emerged from a furnace, it will seem cold. Is it, then, hot or cold? Plato's answer is that it is neither in its own right, seeing that each of the two conditions it appears to have depend upon something else. Again, having immersed one hand in very hot water and the other in very cold water I put them both into tepid water, the tepid water will seem both hot and cold at the same time. If, having gone to sleep in the dark, I wake in a shuttered room, it will seem very light; if I enter it from brilliant tropical sunshine out of doors, dark. Which is it, light or dark? The answer is, neither or both according to the way in which you choose to look at it.

The point of all these examples is the same. Things don't possess qualities in their own right; they don't, that is to say, really possess any quality, precisely because they can be shown to have opposite qualities according to the point of view from which they are regarded. Hence, as Plato puts it, they oscillate between different qualities. Now that which hasn't any quality in

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itself but oscillates between a number of different qualities, cannot truly be said to be anything at all.

### THE PROBLEM OF SUBSTANCE

But, it may be said, even if the qualities vary and are relative, the *thing* that has them is fixed, stable and certain, and that at least is real. But is this in fact so?

Here let me introduce an argument derived from other philosophers, an argument which Plato doesn't actually use, though it is wholly in the line with his thought. It raises what is called in philosophy the problem of substance. A thing, we normally suppose, isn't just a bundle of qualities, of weight and colour and temperature and size and so on. It is also a thing or substance which has the qualities; that is to say, it is not just heaviness or lightness, redness or yellowness, heat or cold, largeness or smallness, it is a *thing that is* heavy or light, red or yellow, hot or cold, large or small. Now this thing which has or underlies the qualities but is other than they, is what one would normally think of as the substance of the thing considered. But can such a substance be found?

Let us consider an object, a chocolate, let us say. It has a number of qualities. Let us specify some. The chocolate, then, is brown and soft and sweet and sticky. Now let us imagine these qualities taken away one by one and see what is left. First we will abolish the brownness. What is left? Something which is soft, sticky and sweet. Now let us abolish the softness and we are left with something that is sweet and sticky. Now the sweetness, and something which is sticky is left. Now let us suppose that the stickiness, too, is taken away. What is left now? Something that was brown and sweet and sticky and soft, but is so no longer.

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It is clear that we can proceed in the same way with any other qualities that the chocolate might be supposed to possess. These, too, could in theory be stripped away. What, then, would remain? Something which has no qualities. But can there be such a something? And again, even if there could be, could we know it or think of it? It is, I think, obvious that we could not, since we only know things by reason and in virtue of the qualities that they exhibit. A thing without qualities is both unknowable and unthinkable—is, indeed, nothing at all.

Hence, it looks as if a thing is nothing but a collection or, to use a more technical term, a unity of the qualities which the thing, if it existed, would normally be said to possess. Yet it is precisely because it is felt to be not merely a bundle or collection of qualities, though we can't see what more than such a bundle or collection it *can* be, that the philosophical problem of substance arises.

To return to Plato. If a thing's qualities vary and are relative and if it is nothing other than in addition to its qualities, in what sense can it be said to *be* at all? What account, in fact, are we to give of its reality?

### THE NATURE OF CHANGE

To answer this question let us turn to Plato's second point. This concerns the nature of change. The point isn't an easy one to put and demands a certain amount of hard thinking for its apprehension.

Let us consider an example of a changing thing, a leaf, let us say, which was green and is now yellow, and let us ask the question, what precisely is it that has changed? Now, if *all* the leaf were

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changing all the time, if nothing was, so to speak, left over which was exempt from the process of change, it wouldn't be possible to say "*this* is the leaf which was green and is now yellow," for, if all of it changed all the time, we should simply have a series of changes which weren't changes *in* anything, for there would be nothing there in addition to the changes for the changes to be attributed to, nothing, that is to say, *which changed*. In order, then, that there may be a changing thing two factors are required; first, change or changes; secondly, an unchanging core or foundation to which the changes happen but which itself is immune from and persists through change, so that we can say "*this* is the thing which was so-and-so and is now something else." The notion of a changing thing involves, then, these two elements; first, the series of changes that occur to it and, secondly, the core that doesn't change which is the thing, whatever it is, to which the changes happen. Without this second factor, there would be merely a series of changes that weren't changes *to* or *in* anything; there would be no leaf that was once green and is now yellow; there would be merely a series of separate momentary leaves.

Now the disconcerting thing is that no such second factor can be found. There is nothing, that is to say, in the physical world, or, we may add, in the mental world that psychology studies, that is not changing and changing all the time. We don't have to go to science or invoke the theory of relativity to be assured of this truth, of which we can convince ourselves by a process of simple reflection. Take any object; take a desk for example. It was made and issued, we will suppose, from a carpenter's shop as a new desk at a certain moment in time. At another moment in time it will also, presumably—

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unless it is artificially broken up and destroyed in the meantime—disintegrate. Now at every moment of time and at every fraction of a moment, however short, the desk is further from its condition of being newly manufactured and nearer to its condition of disintegration. And all of it is nearer; all of it is, therefore, different at any moment from what it was at the preceding moment. Therefore, it is changing and all of it is changing all the time. Therefore, it doesn't satisfy our second condition for a changing thing, since there is no unchanging core to be found anywhere in its physical make-up. Yet clearly there must be such a core, there must be *something* that persists, since otherwise there would be nothing to change but only a continual flux of changes.

### WHAT KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS

At this point Plato makes a fresh start and turns to consider what is involved whenever we *know* something—an act of knowing, certainly, but also presumably something else, that, namely, which is known. A thought, after all, is always a thought of something; you can't think of nothing.

Now it is clear in the first place that we do have definite and certain knowledge whose most prominent examples are to be found in the spheres of logic and mathematics. I *know*, for example, with absolute certainty that  $2 \times 3 = 6$  and that it is equivalent to  $4 + 2$ . I know with equal certainty that the whole is greater than the part; that a tree cannot both be and not be a beech tree; and that, if A implies B and B implies C, then A also implies C. But do I have any knowledge of the physical world which is of an equivalent certainty? Plato's answer is that I do not. How, indeed, could I know

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with certainty something—to take his first point—that turns out to be only a bundle of qualities which don't exist in their own right but only relatively to something else? How—to take his second—can I know something that is in a perpetual state of change and flux, seeing that in order that a thing can be known it must at least *be*, in the sense of being fixed and stable, if only for the moment during which it is known? But if our second argument is to be accepted, things never *are*; they are always halfway on the road to becoming something else, are as Plato puts it, in a state of “becoming.” Hence, in regard to the physical world we can't, if Plato is right, have knowledge, if only because the second condition of knowledge, that there should be something to be known, is, so far as the physical world is concerned, unfulfilled. Yet, as the examples cited from logic and mathematics show, we do in fact have certain knowledge. Of what, then, is this knowledge and upon what sort of objects is it directed? Plato's answer is that it is *of* what he calls Forms, or, as they are sometimes called, Ideas.

### PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

What does he mean by a Form? In order to answer this question let us return to the case of mathematics. I know that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points and that it has length without breadth. But of no straight line that I have ever drawn or seen are these things true. All straight lines that are drawn have breadth, and all the straight lines that I have seen are subject to some degree of distortion from the atmosphere. Normally we aren't aware of this because the degree is so tiny, but if we put the allegedly straight line in water the distortion becomes sufficiently marked to



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be noticeable and the straight edge of a ruler or a stick appears to be bent. The truths, then, that geometry announces about a straight line are only approximately true of the straight lines that are seen and drawn. As Plato puts it, the actual physical straight line tries to approximate to ideal straightness as closely as its condition as a physical thing permits. Or consider a triangle; its three interior angles are, we have been taught, equal to two right angles. But this is not true of any triangle that exists or ever existed in the physical world, if only because no such triangle conforms to the specification for a triangle, seeing that it has sides which have breadth as well as length and which, as we have seen, are not quite straight.

Of what, then, are these truths which geometry teaches true? Plato's answer is that they are true of the ideal triangle or, as he calls it, the Form of triangle which is not itself physical or mental, but to which all material triangles try to approximate so far as they can. So in morals, no act is ever absolutely just, just as no man is absolutely good. No doubt we judge some acts to be more just than others, some men better than others, but we can only so judge them if we have before our minds ideals of absolute justice and goodness by the standard of which their degrees of approximation to the ideal can be measured and compared. For all measure involves a standard or rule which is other than the thing measured. (It would, for example, be nonsense to say that A was three inches taller than B, unless there was a standard of measurement symbolised by rulers and tape measures by reference to which their respective heights could be assessed.

Now the distinctive characteristic of Plato's theory is his insistence that this standard of measure-

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ment which, I suppose, most people think of as being in some sense mental, an idea, perhaps, in our minds, not only exists independently of us but is absolutely and ultimately real, is, in fact, an example of that ideal and perfect reality to which the relative and changing things of the physical world only approximate. It conforms, therefore, to the conditions which, as we have seen above, must be satisfied if we are to have knowledge—that is to say, it is a fixed and stable object capable of being known.

### ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIVERSALS

Let us try to reach a similar conclusion from a fresh starting point. Suppose that you think of some general abstract quality like whiteness. Of what, precisely, is it that you are thinking? Of some one white thing? But the thought of whiteness is not the same as the thought of snow or cream or sheets. Of all the white things that there are? But we don't know all the white things that there are, and I can certainly think of whiteness without having to think even of all the white things that I have ever seen and known. Is it, then, of some notion or idea in my mind? But if this were the case, when I think of whiteness I should be thinking of something quite different from what you think of when you think of whiteness, since each of us would be thinking of an idea which was, so to speak, private to himself, and we should never succeed in thinking about the same thing. How, then, it might be asked, should we ever manage to communicate? Also if whiteness were only an idea in my mind, to abolish my mind would be to abolish whiteness, so that a world from which all knowing minds were removed would be a world in which there were no

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colours and, we may add, no shapes, sizes, temperatures or textures. Now there seems to be no reason why we should suppose this to be so. Plato answers that to think of whiteness is to think of a Form which is neither mental nor material, which exists independently both of our minds and also of all the things that there are which happen to be white. Plato postulates a world of real things, the Forms, which stand for all the qualities which physical objects have in common. Whenever a number of objects or a number of acts exhibit a common quality, whiteness, for example, or hardness, or recklessness, say, or justice, then, on his view, there is a Form for that quality and it is of these Forms that we have certain knowledge. Because the most outstanding examples of the Forms are those of *common* qualities, they are sometimes called "Universals."

Nor is the theory limited to the Forms of common qualities. It can be extended to embrace all objects of thought. Suppose, for example, that you and I start to think about Caesar as, indeed, we must do when we make any statement about him. Of what are we thinking? Of Caesar's body? But this has long ago disintegrated and become worms, grass, cattle and the bodies of other human beings, and it is certainly not of these that we are thinking when we think of Caesar. Of his mind? But his mind may no longer exist, and there is no reason to suppose that it is only possible to think of Caesar, provided that we believe in the immortality of the mind or soul. Of what we read in the history books? But what we see in the history books is only a number of black marks, the letters, on a white background, the page. Of some idea or thought in our own minds? But, once again, the difficulty arises

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that, if this is indeed the case, then no two persons have ever succeeded in thinking of the same thing. Plato's answer would be that the Caesar of whom we think is of the same nature as the Form of whiteness, neither mental nor material, not in time or space, but owning some very important relation, into whose nature I cannot here enter, to the living body and mind of Caesar which once existed in the physical world.

Plato's view is that reality consists of these Forms which, precisely because they are not material or even mental, are not inhabitants of the physical world and do not change, are exempt from the criticisms which, he brings against the inhabitants of what he calls "the world of becoming." Moreover, since they do not belong to the world of "becoming," it is possible to have *knowledge* of the Forms, although it is not possible to have knowledge of the world of "becoming." Hence all those features that disqualify the world of becoming from being treated as completely real, are not present in the case of the Forms.

Plato held that the Forms manifest or express themselves in the world of becoming, bestowing upon it the qualities that we perceive with our senses. Thus a pillar-box is red because the Form of redness is expressed or manifested in it, a table square because of the presence in it of the Form of squareness. The pillar-box and the table try, as it were, to be as red and as square, that is, to approximate to the Forms of redness and squareness which are manifested in them, as closely as the stuff, the raw material, of which they are composed permits.

### THE RAW MATERIAL OR STUFF OF THE SENSIBLE WORLD

What, then, is this raw material? We cannot say, since, if all the qualities and features it exhibits are

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due to the presence in it of the Forms, it is itself by definition without qualities. Now, as we have seen, we can only know something in terms of and by reason of the qualities which it exhibits. Therefore, if it is without qualities we can't know it or say anything about it. Hence Plato postulates a sort of quality-less stuff a kind of featureless medium or raw material in which the Forms manifest themselves and upon which they bestow the qualities which constitute the familiar world. He sometimes calls this stuff "not-being," since it is at the opposite pole of reality to the world of true being, the world of the Forms, while the familiar world which draws one of its constituents, the manifested Forms, from reality while its other constituent is derived from not-being, is regarded as fluctuating about, as it were, between the two. That is why it is not possible to have certain knowledge of the qualities of physical things which, as we have seen, fluctuate about between extremes, being neither one thing nor the other—the rabbit which is neither and both large and small, the water which is neither and both hot and cold—but partaking of each. That, too, to transfer the argument to another sphere, is why there is among us no certain knowledge in regard to what is beautiful or good, but only a mass of conflicting opinions. Thus people continually disagree in regard to particular actions as to whether they are right or wrong, and works of art as to whether they are beautiful or the reverse, precisely because the actions of individuals and of Governments like particular works of art such as pictures and pieces of music, since they belong to the physical world, must partake of the features of the world of becoming. This means that they don't really possess any fixed or stable qualities of good-

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ness or justice in the one case or of beauty or ugliness in the other, in virtue of which they could qualify as the objects of certain knowledge.

Plato's conception of reality, then, is of a number of immaterial Forms which are perfect, changeless and imperishable, and which manifest themselves in the world of becoming and are thus responsible for the qualities and features that we perceive in the familiar everyday world. Upon the stuff of this world which Plato thinks of as a kind of featureless flux, the Forms bestow its qualities and features, much as a seal stamps its impress upon a flux of sealing wax.

### THE CAVE

We have now to try to relate this conception of reality to the matters discussed in earlier chapters of this book where we raised such questions as, what things are truly good and valuable in themselves and how should life be rightly lived?

Plato holds that by a suitable training and education of the mind it is possible to achieve a knowledge of the world of Forms, although this knowledge is, even in the best and wisest of us, fluctuating and obscure. In a famous allegory in his Dialogue called *The Republic*, he likens us to prisoners in chains sitting in a row in a cave all of whom are looking in the same direction. Behind their backs is a raised bench or platform and behind that a fire. Along the bench there passes a succession of figures and objects, the shadows of which are cast by the fire upon the wall in front of the row of prisoners. Hence what the prisoners see are not real things but shadows which, never having seen anything else, they take to be real. As the result of a training in philosophy the heads of the prisoners are, as it were, turned round so that

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they become aware of the figures themselves. In other words, they advance one stage in the knowledge of what is real. Plato's allegory envisages a yet further advance in which the prisoners ascend out of the cave altogether and emerge into the daylight, so that they now see things, not by the flickering gleam of the fire in the cavern, but by the full light of the Sun. Into the nature of this further advance and the vision it reveals I cannot here follow him.

Much of Plato's *Republic*, which is perhaps the most famous book of philosophy in the world, is directed to questions of politics, ethics and education.

### APPLICATION TO POLITICS AND ETHICS

The purpose of Plato's theory of politics is to devise such a form of government for a community that a certain proportion of the citizens, namely, those who show an aptitude for philosophy, will be in a position to govern and direct the lives of the rest. "The rest" are divided into two classes, the class of soldiers who protect, and of workers, technicians and business men who produce for the State. The training and education of these two classes is designed in such a way as to produce an attitude of willing acquiescence in the actions of the government so that they are content not to meddle in affairs of State, but submit themselves to the rule of the wisest and best, that is, of Plato's philosophers who belong to a separate class. The provisions for education, which are very elaborate, are in fact wholly designed to ensure that each member of each class, the ruler, the soldier and the worker, will be content to devote himself to the duties proper to his class.

The philosophers who are chosen from among those who prove themselves to be the most intelli-

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gent in youth are subjected to a very strict rule of life. They live together, own everything in common and have no possessions of their own; there is not even distinction between wives and children, the men and women living together rather like the staff in a large co-educational school. This College of Guardians, as Plato calls it, is subject to a further and much more rigid system of education whose outlines Plato describes, which is designed so to clear, enlarge and develop their minds that they will become capable of a knowledge of the Forms. Thus they obtain a knowledge of the Forms of justice and goodness, not as they are imperfectly manifested in the things, institutions, actions and persons of the their vision of the Forms, they frame laws for the world of becoming, but as they really are in themselves. Applying the knowledge revealed to them in governance of the State. These precisely because they are drawn up in the light of and modelled upon the structure of the reality which has been revealed to the philosophers, are the best possible laws since they bring to birth in the world of "becoming" the goodness, truth and justice which have their true dwelling in the realm of "being." Consequently the laws and regulations by which the philosopher-guardians direct the life of the citizens are the best possible. If we make the further assumption that the minds of the citizens will in course of time be so moulded by the training and education which they have received, that they are content with their lot, holding on all subjects the opinions which the philosophers who have framed their education deem suitable to their class and condition, revering, as Plato puts it, the things that the City reveres and abhorring the things that the City abhors, we can easily see that Plato's ideal City, once established,



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might well continue indefinitely. (Plato did not, in fact, think that it would do so, but the reasons for his opinion do not concern us here.)

Once a man has achieved a vision of reality, that is to say, of the Forms which he has hitherto known obscurely manifested in the world of becoming, it would be natural for him, Plato thinks, to remain indefinitely fixed in the contemplation and enjoyment of his vision; for why should a mind which has become capable of intercourse with the world of "being" step back, as it were, into the world of "becoming"? Why—to return to Plato's allegory—should the prisoners, once they have found the way up and out, go back into the cave? Plato's answer is, in effect, through a feeling of duty. It is, after all, to the City that the Guardians owe their existence; its soldiers have protected, its workers fed and clothed them; above all, its educators have trained them to love the things that are good and true and beautiful and have so refined and developed their minds that they have become capable of the vision of reality. They owe, then, a debt to the City which they cannot help but wish to discharge. They discharge the debt by assuming the duties of government and the charge of the all-important education of the young for a limited period of years, after which they return for the rest of their lives to the pursuit of philosophy and the contemplation of the Forms.

### SUMMARY

I have undertaken this very brief sketch of Plato's Theory of Ideas and indicated its bearing upon ethics and politics for three reasons. In the first place, it constitutes an example, perhaps the best known in the history of philosophy, of the distinction between

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the world as it appears and the world as it really is, a distinction which the majority of philosophers and nearly all the religions have thought it necessary to introduce. In the second place, it provides an example of the way in which the ethical questions which we considered in the first five chapters of this book lead back to metaphysical questions from which they spring. To put this in other words, it shows how, directly you begin to think about such ideas as those of good and right and doing your duty, and to consider how people ought to behave, you are led on to speculate about the nature of things in general and the purpose and meaning, if any, of human life.

In the third place, it provides an answer to some of the ethical questions which were raised in Chapter V, where we asked what are the things which are really worth possessing and pursuing in life, the things that are really worth while? Plato's answer is that those things are really worth while which bear witness to the presence in the world of becoming of the world of reality. Or, to accept his formula, those things which partake of certain Forms, and in particular the Forms of truth, goodness and beauty. We should do well, therefore, to pursue and to value in and for themselves in philosophy and science and learning and scholarship such things as are true, and in art and literature and nature such things as are beautiful, and we should also try to live good lives. Now the truths which these injunctions embody are, according to Plato, revealed to man's intellect when it has been sufficiently developed and refined by training and education to be able to penetrate through and behind the world of appearance to a knowledge of the world of reality.